THE Hudson REVIEW

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DUNCAN BELL:
The Wedding of Scotland and Poland

YVES BONNEFOY:
Of the Movement and the Immobility of Douve

JOHN HOLLOWAY:
The Poetry of Edwin Muir

MAUREEN HOWARD:
Bridgeport Bus—a story

THIS PERIODICAL IS NOT TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS ROOM

DENIS DONOGHUE:
Dublin Letter

POEMS BY JOSEPH BENNETT, ALEXANDER CRAIG, S. S. GARDONS, DONALD HALL, X. J. KENNEDY, ELDER OLSON, DOROTHY ROBERTS, WILLIAM STAFFORD.

REVIEWS BY BENJAMIN DE MOTT, B. H. HAGGIN, CECIL HEMLEY, NORMAN N. HOLLAND, EARL MINER, VIVIAN MERCIER, JOHN SIMON, JOHN THOMPSON.

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The Hudson Review

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Notes on Contributors

DUNCAN BELL is the pseudonym of a well-known younger poet. His contribution in this issue is the first chapter of a book which the author describes as "mainly autobiographical—except where facts have been changed to protect the innocent."

DONALD HALL is currently teaching at the University of Michigan after spending last year in the village of Thaxted in Essex.

S. S. GARDONS is the pseudonym of a former Hudson Review Fellow in Poetry who now teaches at Wayne State University.

MAUREEN HOWARD's first novel, *Not a Word About Nightingales,* was published in London by Secker & Warburg. Bridgeport Bus is her first published story.

YVES BONNEFOY is widely recognized as one of the outstanding younger French poets. The poems in this issue comprise the first two sections of his book, *Du Mouvement et de l'Immobilité de Douve,* first published in 1953. The Mercure de France has graciously authorized permission to reprint. The translator, GALWAY KINNELL, is the author of *What a Kingdom It Was,* a first book of poems published by Houghton Mifflin.

In 1960, JOHN HOLLOWAY, the British poet-philosopher-critic, published a new book of poems and one of criticism. He is now in the process of completing a book-length long poem.

X. J. KENNEDY, a 1960 Bread Loaf Fellow, teaches at Michigan. His first book of poems, *Nude Descending a Staircase,* will be published later this year by Doubleday.

ALEXANDER CRAIG returned home to Australia last Spring after receiving his M.F.A. degree at the State University of Iowa.

(Continued on page 636)

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DUNCAN BELL

The Wedding of Scotland and Poland

My father was Jamaican. Of his early life all that I have is a glimpse, obtained by chance several years after his death. I was then employed by a publishing house in New York. Leafing through a pile of magazines, looking for "book ideas," I came upon an article written by a lady who had a powerful belief in the supernatural and, to prove a point, related an uncanny coincidence that had happened when she lived in Jamaica. One night she dreamed that a young friend named Neville arrived at her house. In the light of day this seemed absurd, for he lived on the other side of the island and had no reason, that she knew of, to be travelling that way. But that very day he did arrive; he was being taken by his father to Kingston, to begin the study of law. I have no doubt that the boy in her story was my father, for his name was Neville, and he was a lawyer. Though this is all I know of his beginnings, it is a crucial moment: the country boy in his blue suit, with his hair carefully brushed, sits stiffly on the seat of the buggy, hardly turning his head toward me.

His family had come, some generations back, from Scotland—probably at the end of the eighteenth century when the landless Scots emigrated to the West Indies and Canada, or filled the ranks of the army. The best evidence of Scottish ancestry was my Aunt Annie, who sometimes visited us in a black buggy, drawn by a black horse, herself clothed in black from hat to boots. She had an idea that I liked feeding mangoes to her horse, and would reach into her handbag, take out a mango that was spotted and pulpy, and hand it to me. When I held up the mango to the horse, the brute turned his head suddenly, showing his long yellow teeth, snapped up the mango, and gobbled it, with ropes of froth trailing from his jaws. I was in terror of that horse, but, above all, children were taught to be obedient. On the verandah where my mother poured tea, Aunt Annie talked about the past in which her Scottish ancestors figured, and certain Presbyterian ministers

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whose offers of marriage, it seemed, she had scrupulously refused. Later, in the drawing room, she sang:

"Maxwelton Braes are bonny
Where early fa's the dew,
And 'twas there that Annie Laurie
Gie me her answer true. . ."

I identified the singer with the heroine of the song, wondering how anyone as hideous as the old lady in black, with her laced-up boots, could ever have made a man want to lie down and die.

My father's relatives were all aunts who lived together at the house of one aunt who had married a long-suffering civil servant. They sat on their verandah fanning themselves through the hot afternoons, and went to church twice on Sundays. When I stayed with them—and for two or three years when my father and mother were drifting toward divorce, I did so frequently—they tried to train me away from the liberal habits I had picked up in my father's house. My father's profession, the sweating work of the Kingston criminal courts, was the center of his existence; he had no theology and kept no count of Sundays. Instead, he was equipped for all practical eventualities. In a drawer of his desk he kept revolvers and pistols, for he was an able prosecutor, and more than one native, as he was being dragged out of the dock, had threatened to kill him. Once, in my childish exploring, when I opened a closet I found a sword and other regalia; he must have belonged to a lodge or brotherhood. In another closet there was a black box with electric wires and attachable glass tubes and bulbs—it must have been one of those apparatuses for "toning up the system" that were sold to progressive, professional men. On Sunday he would either work in the "carpenter's shop," hammering, grinding and sawing, or he would take us swimming at Bournemouth, and treat us to Delaware Punch. He had made his house a kind of fortress, with a high fence around it, removing himself from the genteel poverty and piety of his family, and his choice of a wife made the break almost complete.

My mother was born in Poland. When she was only twelve her widowed mother emigrated to New York, taking the older children with her and leaving my mother to bring on the rest. She managed it somehow. In New York my grandmother ran a small

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restaurant and, out of the great charity of her heart, made her home a kind of way-station for immigrants. As a young girl my mother worked in the sweat shops of the garment district, and conceived such a loathing for the work, and immigrants too, that it determined the rest of her life. She took singing lessons and dreamed of being a prima donna; and when she was at home, in the crowded flat, she isolated herself from the smell and jabber of the ghetto by shutting the door of her little room. Her chance to escape came when a movie company advertised for girls to try out for parts. The test was to jump from a bridge into a pool of water and pretend to be drowning. My mother could not swim, but she jumped—anything was better than bending and squinting over a sewing-machine. They fished her out, and she was given a part in a troupe of bathing beauties. The company sailed for Jamaica. There she met my father, who was then in his thirties; he followed her back to the States and courted her with roses, and they were married. On their honeymoon they travelled in Europe, visiting the museums and the battlefields of the First World War, which were still littered with interesting fragments. When they returned to the island they bought a house in the suburbs and lived as well-to-do colonials. This required an establishment of four or five servants—a cook, housemaid, Nannie, garden-boy, and chauffeur—who were paid from ten shillings to a pound a week. My father, as befitted a successful lawyer, entertained his friends and acquaintances on a fashionable scale. There were lawn-tennis parties, and piano lessons for the children, and my mother played golf at the Liguanea Club. At night in the nursery, when Nannie had bedded us down, she would tell us stories of her childhood in Poland, of snow and wolves, and the rats that swarmed during a famine; or else she read us fairytales. My father's family had not warmed to her, and she, on her side, found their way of life insipid. She still dreamed of being a prima donna.

Kingston, the capital, with its dusty streets, shop awnings and white-helmeted traffic policemen, spread to the South of us, down to the great blue harbor. Above us, the main road with tram lines climbed gently to Halfway Tree—there was no tree, but a clock tower—and divided there into other roads that climbed steeply into the hills, blue ridges that interlocked and faded in

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the sun and loomed in moonlight. One road, the left turn at the clock tower, went to the scorched, windless cane fields of the Liguanea plain, and the old, ruined capital, Spanish Town. But I knew nothing of geography. I knew only our garden and the lane, shaded with bamboos, down which Nannie wheeled me in a pram, ending at the South Camp Road, where a sentry, one of His Majesty's fusiliers, in khaki and pith helmet, motionless in his box, stood clasping his rifle as prescribed by regulations. At the other end of the lane was Cross Roads, where all the tram lines met, and where the Movie Theater, every afternoon at four, opened its doors to children. This was Arabia, where the prancing, fighting, pratfalling, kissing phantoms held us amazed. Sometimes my mother would take me shopping down town, where I waited in the stifling dimness of dress shops, while the Syrian merchant undid his flowery bolts. There was a little cash-box that ran up and down and to and fro on wires, and called attention to itself at the end of the trip with a *ping* of its bell. Sometimes, on a Sunday, the chauffeur would drive us up into the hills, and bring us back at dusk when fireflies were glimmering. There were hump-backed Brahma cattle in the fields, and barefoot women striding down the roads to market, driving their donkeys and balancing on their erect heads baskets full of vegetables, with maybe a hen or two lying trussed on top. When we slowed down to go through a village—a collection of mud-walled huts with roofs of palm leaf or tin—I would smell the odors of native cooking—frying saltfish and ackee in coconut oil—and sometimes a native boy of my own age, naked from the waist down, would gaze through the glass window of our car with wide eyes, or a woman, wrinkled and toothless, shouted something and threw her head back in laughter. On other drives we went along the shore, past Rockfort, to the open beaches on which the Caribbean roared and whispered. We picked up sea shells and looked beyond the rollers to the horizon where traces of smoke showed that ships were laboring with the great world. From the mainland a narrow peninsula curved out, enclosing the harbor; a road was being built on it by convicts, to reach Port Royal, the city of the buccaneers that had once been rich and infamous; struck by an earthquake, it was now only a heap of shacks where goats rambled.

Soon I passed out of the hands of Nannies and became the

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companion of garden boys. These, who seemed to me old and full of cunning, were in fact simple country boys at the mercy of their wages. No wonder they were so tolerant when I got in their way as they clipped hedges, rolled the tennis court, or watered flowers. But, besides the deference they had to have, there was a kindness of their own, for which they were not paid. At noon, when the garden boy cooked his meal of rice and peas, or dumplings, in a can suspended by a stick over a fire built on stones, he would tell me a story. Sometimes it was about Brer Nancy, the spider, a tale that went back to Africa, where the garden boy's forefathers had told it, before they were sold into slavery. Or it might be about Brer Mongoose and John Crow. And the garden boy could make things. Out of a lignum vitae branch he'd cut a fork; to this he'd tie on rubber bands, and to the loose ends of these tie a leather piece for gripping stones. There was a slingshot. Or he'd cut a calabash gourd in halves, scoop out the evil-smelling pulp, and scrape the shells until they were smooth cups. As I sat near the smoke of the fire, listening to the country patois dramatize some danger Brer Mongoose had got into, and from which he'd extricate himself by trickery, and watching the brown hands cut and scrape, I was perfectly absorbed. But garden boys didn't last; they were always being discharged for "laziness" or "impertinence." One of my aunts, in particular, frowned on my associating with them. When she visited us, if I had been out of sight for some time, she would begin crying "Coo-ee! Coo-ee!", the Australian bush call, and appeared soon after, to bring me back inside the house. She was afraid I would get sunstroke or turn black.

Every morning my father, immaculate in a white suit and panama hat, set off in his red coupe; and at twilight, when the swallows were twittering over the tennis court, he returned from his struggles in the courts of justice. Twilight was the hour of music; the Victrola wheezed out the choruses of *Floradora,* Italian operas and Sousa marches, fading with the years until they seemed the voices and instruments of ghosts. At twilight the sea breeze came, stirring the poinciana and hibiscus flowers; and then rose the multitudinous glittering stars and constellations. One evening, as he mounted the stairs briskly, my father carried not only the usual fat bag of law books and documents in his right hand, but also a round cylinder of leather in his left. After supper he opened this

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mystery, drew out a brass telescope, and set it up on its tripod. While he puffed on his cigar, a red spark in the darkness, we took turns looking through the lens. In the moon, rising round and sliver-white above the Blue Mountains, I thought I saw, or was persuaded to see, the bearded king, George V, like the profile on his shilling. While lizards hopped from the vine onto the railing of the verandah, casting dragon shadows on the walls, and frogs croaked in the garden, the moon returned through a million stars toward Scotland and Poland, whose spirits had been bound, by an enchantment of marriage, in these tropics.

* * *

When I was nine I was sent, as my brother had been sent before me, to school in the mountains a hundred miles west of Kingston. The school was called a college; in the States, such institutions are called prep-schools. Together with five other boys I was carried in an open touring car along the straight asphalt road to Spanish Town, and up winding, white hill roads to Mandeville, and then up mountains, by dizzy precipices, while one after another the boys were sick, and the air grew noticeably cooler, and the older boys, having recovered their stomachs, began to point out familiar landmarks. The earth here was red—the red I'd often seen and smelled on my brother's khaki clothes when he was home for the holidays—and at last we approached a long stone wall and a gate. Beyond this there was an avenue of willows that swayed mournfully, as if in sympathy with a frightened boy, and the famous College with its red roofs.

By the end of that day I had had my first fight, being pushed by a circle of boys into another "new boy," who had red hair, until we pummeled each other. I had eaten my first school dinner —bread with margarine, yam, and corned beef, the corned beef that would be served so often, and in its more preserved condition would give us all the bellyache. I had sat in Chapel for the first time, and heard the prayers read by a master, a thin figure of ill omen, seeming in his black gown like Brer John Crow, who enunciated the text in an Oxford accent. Then I went to bed—an iron frame and sagging mattress, in a dormitory with twenty other boys, all shouting at once about what they had done in the "hols," until the lights went out. Then I listened to their whisper-

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ing, the creaking of the roof, and the howling of the wind as it swept the commons and passed out to sea. It did not sound like any wind I had ever known.

And by the end of the first week I had been given my first desk and unspillable ink pot, and had grown accustomed to the bell—the bell that tolled us awake at six, and out of the dormitories at six-thirty, and to breakfast . . . cocoa, bread, and porridge with weevils in it . . . and to Chapel, classes, and games. And I had had my first "licking," with a switch—all the masters carried switches—and had greased the football boots of one of the Big Boys, and had been licked for not doing it right—the Big Boys had the privilege of beating the smaller. I won't dwell on the details, but there were some things about the school that were unusual in the twentieth century.

Beating and bullying were ordinary. Once when I passed the Sixth Form classroom, where the Big Boys were, I glanced through the window. One of the inhabitants of that den, a surly fellow who was notorious for his bullying, called to me in a voice filled with malice, and I entered, trembling. The Big Boys lined up in two rows, and made me run the gauntlet from a far corner to the door, each kicking me as hard as he could, until I fell through the door. I felt as if my backbone was broken. None of the small boys ever complained about this sort of thing. It would have been unmanly—though what manliness is inculcated by cruety, I have yet to discover. And besides, to whom could one complain? To one's parents, a hundred miles away? To the Headmaster? God forbid! He was a fat man with small pig eyes and a yellow moustache, who taught only the upper forms, where we could hear him shouting out in Latin, and he himself was the worst beater of all. He was, in fact, a sadist with absolute power. To the other masters? One of them, the sportsmaster, had been a sergeant in the British Army; he crept about at night, after "lights out," on tennis shoes, and when he caught anyone talking, or out of bed, he would give him six licks through thin pajamas. Or if he couldn't find the culprit, he would wake the whole dormitory and have us stand at the foot of our beds for two or three hours. This was a British colonial education in the early 'thirties.

What the system inculcated was a lively instinct of self-preservation. It would have been good training for the Somme or the

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Khyber Pass. We learned our lessons, and we learned how to cheat when we didn't know them, so as not to be whipped or made to stay in and do "lines" after school hours—"I am an ignorant, impudent, lazy fellow," copied five hundred times in faultless handwriting. We learned to fight, and never to cry, and we learned to laugh with the master and jeer at the victim—the boy who couldn't add and subtract, or stuttered, or blushed cherry-red. We were intolerant of cowardice and timidity, or any eccentricity of body or mind. We grew tough and stringy, for we were always underfed, or fed on rotten beef and greasy pork until we couldn't stomach it; and we were well exercised, for we had to go out on the playing fields every afternoon. Yet the school had this advantage: there was virtually no discrimination based on class, color, or money. No Negro, Syrian, or Chinese boy would be mistreated simply because he was Negro, Syrian, Chinese. And if anyone, regardless of his parentage, distinguished himself as an athlete—or, in the higher forms, as a student—he would be honored. Sometimes there was favoritism shown to the English, or nearly English, physical type, but it would not hold if the boy was ridiculous. The boy with extra pocket money might buy himself friends, but if he didn't bathe regularly, or couldn't fight, or was hopeless at his lessons, his friends would vanish overnight. On the one side, persecution of the weak and stupid by the strong and clever—on the other, a strange but honest democracy. . . .

As with any oppressive government, the real life of the oppressed was underground. Under the rocks that covered us, we swarmed like ants. Between classes, as we strolled in pairs up and down the Barbecue, a concrete square that stretched from the main building to a wall, from which, looking down, you saw the mountain sloping to Pedro Plain, the sea glittering beyond, and to the right the Black River winding through marshes, we talked incessantly—about football, and model trains, stamp-collecting, movies we'd seen in the holidays, and one another. There were secret societies, and some of these would creep off to the woods where, in huts built of sticks and leaves, or in the caves, they were rumored to smoke makeshift cigarettes and carry on satanic rites. We had our intrigues and victories, and our own heroes. A boy who was a fool at arithmetic might be a genius at trade, so that on Sundays, when we all got a slice of "plunkus"—heavy cake with

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occasional raisins in it—he would be seen coming out of the dining room balancing five slices, that he had obtained by exchanging one thing for another, or doing tasks for others, or by betting. One boy was respected for the prolonged and sonorous crepitations with which, in the still of night, he would break wind. What were Brigadier Gerard and Bulldog Drummond to him? One boy knew the history of heavyweight boxing, round by round, and to hear him tell about Corbett's attempted come-back, when he outboxed Jeffries nearly to the end, until he bounced off the ropes into Jeffries' hook, was as good as a movie. And then too there was the variety of fashion—one week everyone would be playing jacks, and then all at once it was spinning gigs; these fiats were mysterious.

I too was a hero, for a day. We ate our meals at long tables, in two rows facing each other, with a master at one end. We were allowed to ask for "seconds" by passing our empty plates up to the master, who would refill them from the dish in front of him. One evening, as I passed my plate up for a second helping of pork—which this evening was exceptionally fat, merely gobbets of fat swimming in gravy—some spirit urged me to whisper, "Meat, please!" The boy next to me seized the plate and passed it on, and, to my horror, as my plate progressed to the head of the table, so did the whisper, increasing in sarcasm and impertinence, until it reached the master. He raised his eyes and transfixed me where I sat. It was obvious that I was the culprit; I was betrayed by the empty space where my plate had been. "There are some small boys," he began, and continued in a cracked, rising voice, glaring at me, while the school sat in silence, savoring every word. I stared back at him, appalled, as one might gaze at an anaconda. Afterwards I was slapped on the back and congratulated, not least by the boys who, by passing on the dreadful words, "Meat, please!", out of malice toward me as much as for any other reason, had got me into that fix.

In matters of sex we were astonishingly innocent. There was a girls' school five miles away, but it might have been in Arcady for all we saw of it, and those creatures in black stockings, the girls, whom we saw once a year when there was a school play—they were creatures of the moon. Some of the Big Boys, to hear them talk of it, during the holidays visited the brothels of Harbour

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Street; and the sportsmaster was said to be the lover of the school nurse; but we had no way of visualizing such enterprises. My classroom neighbor, a boy with a gift for sketching, drew a picture of a nude woman; it was passed from hand to hand; one of his enemies seized the occasion and handled it openly, and the master intercepted it. He called for the artist, and the boy owned up, looking like a dead man. The master told him to come to his study later. When my friend returned from his visit, we crowded round him; we had not really expected ever to see him again. What had happened? "He asked me what it was a drawing of."—"What did you say?"—"I said, a naked woman." Then, it seemed, the master had only looked at him long and thoughtfully, and told him to go. For his answer had shown that the fantasy of his drawing derived not from a sated and refined voluptuousness, spurning all common shapes, but from an ignorance as clear as Adam's before he met with Eve. This was one of the better masters.

Under the khaki we wore on week-days, and Sunday's blue serge, our characters blossomed nevertheless, putting forth various sprigs and petals, shyly guarded and fiercely defended. A stamp album or a crane built from Meccano parts was absolutely private property, to be labored over, displayed, and hidden away, like the carvings that prisoners-of-war make out of beef bones. In the free Saturday afternoons and long Sunday hours between Chapel meetings I turned to books. I read everything that was romantic and—though I was a fairly good athlete—decided for the word rather than the life of action. Or perhaps the decision had been made for me. Sitting under one of the willows, on a hillside, I read novels by Henty, Ian Hay and Jeffrey Farnol, while the clouds went streaming overhead, combining into white shapes of faces, crowds of people, the towers of great cities, and unwracking again. Far below, beyond the plain, was the sea—the sea that, when I was a man, I would cross; and there were the lands, France, England and America, where History took place. Here nothing important ever happened. The willow was not a real willow, and the school buildings were not real; nor was I myself real, for I was not in a book.

More than once I've dreamed I was back at school—a struggling dream, a dream of abandonment, of removal at a great distance from the source of joy. Once I woke from such a dream, with the familiar, sad, haunting sense of loss. It seemed I had

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chosen to go back there, though there were other choices. The dream school was not on the mountain crest, but in one of the valleys or dark approaches below it. As by a transection a large room was opened to me, and there I saw the small scholars bent over their desks, construing Latin. One among them was translating, in a voice more English than the English, a passage, it seemed, of Caesar. He forged ahead bravely till he came on a phrase something to do with "below the hosts contending." The master's voice was interjected; the boy's replied, protesting; he stumbled on. Then the master said, "You will stay in a half hour later," and the boy sank back, answering sadly and with the most sweet, antique English imaginable—I had been reading De Quincey—"Aye, sir, I'm at your pleasure." I felt for him, but darkness closed, and I woke—leaving him there, and the scene, and, it seemed, a part of myself. Then as I lay waking I wondered what it was that always made these dreams so sad; and it came to my mind that it was because to be on that mountain was to be removed at a great distance from my father and mother, but further removed than my companions were, for I never saw my parents together again. Later, when my mother went away from the island, the distance was increased beyond all help. To be on that mountain was to be cut off; and still in these dreams I have been sadly exiled.

* * *

When I try to explain to myself why I had to leave the island, I think of a certain Christmas morning. My father had built a motor-boat, and on holidays and Sundays we sat in it while he steered it to Port Royal and back—a ritual which was, perhaps, his substitute for church-going. The engine hummed, and the sun beat down, and the hills faded into silhouettes of blue cardboard; to offset the monotony I listened for the symphonic arrangements which, I'd discovered, were always playing beneath the surface of the motor noise. It was an unlovely motor boat—my father had built a box-shaped cabin on top of a ship's lifeboat, and bolted a thoroughly efficient, dull engine into the hull. Nothing remarkable ever happened on these rides. We would circle the tarred posts that stood offshore from Port Royal, and look down into the murky water where, contrary to legend, no engulfed cathedral or pirate gold was visible. We would look at Fort Charles, where

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the young Nelson had paced up and down, gracefully supporting the weight of his impending glory. We circled the pelicans on the posts, and put-putted back to Kingston, to the strip of beach we owned. If there was a ship in the harbor we would go slowly around it, and see the cook throw out the slops, or wave to the sailor who leaned, with his arms crossed, staring at us with the weariness of men who have seen all the islands.

That Christmas morning, as we passed a few hundred yards offshore from the Kingston docks, we saw a crowd of natives getting into excursion launches. One of the launches set out from the pier, packed to the gunwales. My gaze wandered away, to the sky, to the slender peninsula that curved around the harbor, to the gulls, and then back again to the shore. The boat of Christmas trippers had vanished. As I gazed, not realizing anything in particular, a general moaning rose from the land and continued. My father swung our boat toward the shore. When we came to the place where the launch had been, only a hat or two floated on the water. The launch had capsized, carrying forty souls to the bottom with scarcely a splash. The sky had the same shining, clear disinterest.

The sadness of the provinces is the thought of life vanishing without a mark. The pellucid sky neither sees nor cares. In the indifference of nature, you are terribly alone. Men are alone in cities too, but they are distracted by the crowd; and all those solitudes, pressing against one another, form the illusion of a common experience, a human condition, which absorbs and—who knows—may even depend on, the loneliness of the individual. So, as Spengler says, everyone wants to live at the center, "the world of the upper floors." The provincial, once he has been exposed to the illusion of the city, would rather sleep in a gutter than go back to his farm. The country runs to seed; the city expands in rectangular blocks—Babylon, Tenochtitlan; the ranks of the army are filled with Germans. Then the city collapses, and the stones of the temple, post-office and theater are stripped to build country cottages. Once more the individual must take on his own shoulders the burden of the sky and infinite silence. Thus Spengler describes the cycle, using centuries for his canvas; but, within the brief story of their lives, innumerable provincials have acted out the same comedy.

My father, after his divorce and new marriage, moved to a new

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house. It was on the harbor, and every morning when I woke, from my window I could see the waves, white-capped, rolling toward me; at night I fell asleep with the sighing of the surf and heavy thudding of coconuts together. The sound of the sea, and the glancing, fragmented sunlight reflected from the sea, permeated our lives. Only city-dwellers despise the pathetic fallacy; during those years I felt that the seascape and myself were in sympathy, or purposefully at odds. The world was adolescent; and toward me, wafted by the sea breeze, or drawn by my own wish, came the slender, tangle-haired, golden Venus.

My lady, whose name was fittingly Italian, appeared one morning at Bournemouth, the swimming pool near our house. I walked out of the locker-room and there she was—no more than twelve years old, with gray eyes and long, yellow hair, dressed in a shabby bathing suit which had, as she passed me with a thoughtless glance, a hole the size of a sixpence in the rear, through which her substance shone. I received a shock, right at the heart. Writers on neurology and anatomy have not, for all their thoroughness, yet explained why the shock of "thunderbolt love," as Stendhal calls it, is received at the heart. Other kinds of love have other locations; but this, the fatal passion, strikes first, and all at once, at the organ of life itself, as though this love, and our human existence, are irreconcilable.

For years she moved in and out of my dreams. Stimulated by the vision, I worked and played in a euphoria which, as no neoplatonist would be surprised to hear, led to my outstripping my companions, taking first place in examinations, getting letters for boxing, gymnastics and target-shooting. I saw her in all maybe half a dozen times, during the holidays, and always in the company of her brother, a milksop to whom I pretended friendship. I can't remember that she ever said anything, but then it didn't matter. Once she went with me, and her puling brother, to a movie at the Carib Theater, a big, new palace in the American style. The movie was *The Firefly*, and to this day the "Donkey Serenade" revives in me the leaping or fainting pulse of those hours.

As I was shaken, so was the island. Hurricanes flattened the sugar and banana plantations, and gusts of rain swept the school buildings on the mountain. While I lay awake murmuring her name, the roof beams creaked and the wind roared. When I re-

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turned to Kingston, floods came pouring down the gullies and swept away the shanties built on the gully beds; and one flood carried a corpse as far as our barbed wire fence, where it remained for a day or two, sinking into the mud. For many nights after, lamplight would glimmer in the hollow left by the body, and as I made my way home from a late movie on foot, I had the most nervous idea of a man's shape, formed of light, lying in the hollow at the gate. Together with the Hollywood images and songs —"For I'll be there, Putting on my top hat"—and the face of my Beatrice gleaming in the stars, this idea of a ghost filled me with a mixture of rapture and terror that was as strong as liquor.

The island was shaken also by politics. The sort of nationalism that had waked in India, and in later years would run through all the colonies like a fever, was then stirring in Jamaica. One symptom was spontaneous clashes between the natives and the British garrison. In a rum shop on Harbour Street there would be a riot between natives, using broken bottles or machetes, and British soldiers swinging belt buckles. Such clashes gave way to street fighting, and soon the troops were marched out in battle dress—which transformed their white, knobby, strangely runted bodies, as I'd seen them in the swimming pool, transfigured them from the poor children of London and Birmingham into faceless ranks with fixed bayonets. The mobs charged; the soldiers fired, and the mobs ran away, leaving their dead in the streets. History, it seemed, could happen here.

My sympathy was with the insurgents. Perhaps it was because I welcomed history at last; these episodes would join my life, however tenuously, with the great world. Or perhaps it went deeper. The colonial habit of leaving children to the care of Nannies and garden boys led, by a kind of justice, to their feeling with the servants. If the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, the Empire was lost in the nursery.

What must be the conscience of a ruling class which, for practical reasons, can never repay, not only the labor, but also the affection, of those who serve it? Once, on one of the bird-shooting expeditions my father used to make, he took me along—I was no more than eight at the time—allowing me to carry a light shotgun. We travelled in the motor-boat around the shore to a remote bay, camped overnight, and the next morning rose early and set off

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inland. At daybreak the birds, whitewing and baldpate, began flashing up from the bush, and we began shooting. When we had filled the bird-racks we started back to the sea. But the sun was high; I grew faint, and the thorny brambles were tearing at my face, hands and feet. Thereupon the garden boy—his name was Jabez—who served also as boat boy and porter, picked me up and carried me. It was a long way to shore, but he never faltered. I can remember the scorching sun, the sharp thorns, and my relief as the broad shoulders carried me down. But I could not then, and never will, repay this act. A society that does not repay its debts to those on whom it depends, must salve its conscience by thinking of the oppressed as not really human. For if humanity were admitted, the rest would follow. This is the reason for *apartheid,* which, though it is mad, is not illogical.

In this revolutionary time I fell in with a group of schoolboys who had discovered the heady, prep-school socialism of the Oxford poets. Though my own taste ran to Hardy and Conrad, writers were so rare that they welcomed me. We wrote for an anti-British newspaper: editorials, stories, and poems; and discussed what must be done to liberate the island. We even distributed the newspaper from our bicycles. What my father would have thought of this, I can only surmise; before it became an issue, he died.

I received the news at school. During morning Prep—that is, the hour before Chapel when we prepared our lessons—I was told to report to the headmaster. I crossed the Barbecue and climbed the stairs to his study. This was a new headmaster; the old one, he of the yellow moustache and pig eyes, had gone to his reward. The new headmaster, a young Canadian, had brought the school thirty years closer to the present. He had eliminated much of the beating, improved the plumbing, and revised the curriculum. I knocked, he told me to enter, and then, without beating about the bush, he told me that my father had died. As I stood astonished, showing no feelings, he added something about "taking it like a man." I had his permission to go home for the funeral.

Of this event, I remember only the gleaming metal coffin on the verandah, and my father darkly propped in it, while incongruously the sea sparkled and the wind chased puffball clouds across the sky. In spite of the headmaster, it would have been better if I had mourned.

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And within a few days, it was too late to mourn. For when the will was read, my brother and I found ourselves virtually disinherited. My father's law offices, the house, the very beds we slept in, went to his wife. He left me a thousand pounds, his revolvers, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica.* What can one do with a father like that? Unless . . . and of course I have often thought about it . . . something was rotten in the state of Denmark. I see him as he sat in his sick-bed—I did not suspect that he was dying—saying to me, "Don't worry. Whatever happens, I've provided for you." What did he mean? Surely not his revolvers. Is it not possible that his last will and testament, if nothing more, was designed by the person who profited most from it?

The men who had been his friends—lawyers, most of them—were not noticeably concerned with my predicament. And I, being young, was not fully conscious of it. In any case, what could I have done? So I took my clothes, books and bicycle over to a boarding-house. And at the end of summer, returned to school for a last year. Any fears that I had for the future were absorbed into the nervousness of the world. The Second World War had begun.

At last a cablegram, like the stroke of a wand, released me from the "castle set upon a hill," as the school described itself. I put my suitcase on the mail van, mounted to the seat beside the driver, and passed out of the gates. A friend was sitting on the wall, kicking his heels. "I'm going to America!" I shouted to him.

His face, and the faces of all the islanders, have faded from memory. They have no substance, no more than the Scots who died of typhoid in their hundreds, and the buccaneers lying under the cracked stones and murky water of Port Royal, and the Spaniards, and the Arawaks who were there before Columbus came. And I could never go back, for I might find myself, as in a dream, compelled to remain there, forever separated from the continent. Yet the mountains and sea and clouds are imprinted on my mind; these streets are merely superimposed—a breath of sea wind can blow them away. And I am still troubled by the islander's illusion, that somewhere else, in the supreme capital city, life is always interesting and meaningful; in that real world, men are brave and loyal and witty, and women are beautiful.

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DONALD HALL

Letter to an English Poet

Your letter describes
what you see from your window. You chose,
among the council
houses and gray cities, to observe

a destroyed abbey
whose stones you touch for their proportion,
the lines of a mind
although the mind is dead. I write you

from an old attic
where the green of maples like a storm
cuts off my winter
prospect of square blocks of the same house.

Maples are the past,
for the settlers liked a good shade tree.
On the older blocks,
ugly frame houses like ours recall

the German merchants
who left their country to avoid war.
Their innocent choice
is useless now. It is sentiment

to love their houses
for being burly like them, and trees
too are evasions.
In America, the past exists

in the library.
It is not the wind on the old stone.
The wind blows in you
like power, and the blades of the mill turn.

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Unmeasured voices
drop lies in their vying to utter
like leaves from maples.
Yet the loose roads and the twelve seasons

allow us to move:
it is what we like most in ourselves.
Most of your country
envies our worst houses, and would sell

abbeys if they could
to Americans who collect. Some
here try to construct
a new abbey without architects

or an idea,
except to represent the shapeless
shape of a nation.
All of them scatter with the dry leaves.

But the best of us
have resembled instead the raiding
millionaires; without
history, we pillage history,

and return loaded
with castles and pagodas, temples
to various gods
whom we invoke in borrowed costume,

fifteen languages
half-learned but poems well-translated,
and a collection
of whatever happened everywhere.

Perhaps this warehouse
of stones is apter at deception
than native ruins,
but who lacks parents adopts the world.

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By the North Sea

A Roman road took us from the village of Bradwell-
on-Sea through marshy crop farms down to the shore
on a ridge which was so gradual

my friend had to point it out. Yet in a tidal flood
the road is a strip of dry land in a plain
of water. Now the sloping meadows

erupted with the lean daffodils of March. We walked
tilting our bodies against the northern wind.
In the ditches there were crumbling rows

of four-foot concrete trylons. "One Sunday in nineteen-
forty, we set branches in the largest fields
to stop the gliders." A radar screen

turned in its arc to the north, looking out to the sea.
Past it an immense shape hovered on the gray
marsh and against the estuary,

flattened by the distance. Gulls swooped at it like a ship.
Cranes swirled over the Nuclear Power Station.
On each side of its concrete, we saw

the wide waters which washed inland as far as Maldon,
and tied near the banks, the left-over bodies
of freighters and tankers hung on chains,

the trash of a long war, and of an economy
of sailors. Ahead of us, where the road struck
straight at the sea, the afternoon sun

illuminated a narrow stone barn. "St. Peter's,"
said my friend, "where Bishop Cedd made his mission
to Saxons in six-hundred-fifty."

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No trees or cottages stood beside it, where it backed
to the sea like the last king of a nation
beaten from its plains by invaders.

The sun made black shadows within the stone and tile wall,
as rough as if the sea wind had worked at it
to raise the surfaces like landscape.

"The new brick of the side is where a farmer hacked out
a door to make it a barn. It was only
eighty-odd years ago that someone

"saw that it was Cedd's St. Peter's, and changed it back
into a church." The Bishop had scavenged tiles
from the Roman fort of Othona

which had held the mouth of the estuary against
Saxon invaders, until the Romans left
to defend their own city. Inside,

rubble covered the floor. The postcard box was broken,
and there were no postcards. More bricks had filled in
Cedd's narrow arches, but the color

of the new brick revealed the old shapes. Outside we looked
for Othona, and found the piece of thick wall
which remains above ground. "In the marsh,"

my friend said, "the tank trenches of the last war dug up
cartloads of Roman sea-wall, when we waited
for a new invasion from the sea."

We walked toward the mouth of the estuary, and past
a bird sanctuary, to see the quonsets
of a religious community

where men lived in the summers to be near Cedd's outpost.
Then we returned to the village, on the road
which keeps its head out of the water.

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Detroit

There is a cool river
which flows among the red and yellow
pennants of the gas stations,
and through the black brick
of the car factories.
Smoke does not dirty it.
Children splash through it
on their Lambrettas.
It does not disturb the drought
which burns the evergreens
on the square lawns of foremen.
Yet willows grow
from the moss on the bank.
Under the mist of the branches
sit William Blake,
Thomas Jefferson,
Huckleberry Finn,
and Henry James
They are thinking about fish.
They are watching the river: it flows
through the city of America
without fish.

The Grass

If he looks at the grass
out his window in rain,
while the new buds
turn the air green

at the ends of branches,
he wants to say, Look!
Look at the grass!
It is under

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the green grass,
among stones and the downward
probe of the trees,
that everything builds

or alters itself.
He is led
down the tight stair
with his eyes covered,

and hears the slow words
of water. He listens,
like the roots
of the moist grass.

The Tree and the Cloud

In the middle distance
a tree stands,
above it a cloud.

The tree is a raised fist.
It moves so slowly
you cannot see it move.

The cloud changes.
It is almost nothing,
and the wind pushes it.

The tree is an engine
for becoming itself
in the dirt and the sun.

The cloud resembles
whatever we see there.
The tree is chopped down

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to be changed entirely,
but if a cloud rips
it becomes other clouds.

The tree is hard to the hands.
To touch the cloud
hardens the touching.

The Sea

I stand at the rail
of a ship which is sailing
through the pale Atlantic.
I stare at the sea
like a monk.

. . .

I remember watching
from the porch of a cottage.
The loose bulk swayed.

. . .

She is the mother of calms
and the hot grasses;
the mother of cliffs
and of the grinding sand;
she is the mother of the dead
submarine, which rolls
on a beach among gulls.

. . .

The drunken waves argue
the same sentences
over and over, as if
no one will understand them.

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S. S. GARDONS

To a Child

We've taken the dog for his walk
To the practise football field;
We sit on a dead branch, concealed
In the tall grass and trees
Near the old spring; we talk the usual talk
About the birds and the bees.

How strange to have come here.
In the thick, matted grass, ten feet away,
Some twenty years ago, I lay
With my first girl; half-dead
Or half-insane with fear
That I called righteousness, I fled.

We always seem to choose
Odd spots; we used to go stone-dapping
On the riverbanks where lovers lay
By their beached, green canoes
Abandoned in each other's arms all day;
You asked why were they napping.

We've sat on cemetery
Stones to sing; saw a flattened toad
On the cemetery road
That no one had seen fit to bury;
There, we deciphered dark
Names carved in stone; names carved in white birch bark.

We've waded up the creek
Over sharp stones and through deep
Slime, to its source; caught a turtle
And carried him home to keep.
At best, he lived a week;
We said *that* ought to make the garden fertile.

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We've named the animals in the park;
Watched a caged squirrel caper,
Patted a baby tapir,
Fed milk to the llamas, fawns and goats that roam
Loose, in a sort of Noah's Ark
Or home away from home.

We heard a bantie chick there that had wandered
Into the wrong pen;
It kept on peeping, scurrying
To a huge indignant hen
That fled. You said we'd bring
Our feather duster for it to crawl under.

And I mailed you long letters
Though you were still too young to read;
Sent you the maple wings that fly,
Linden gliders and torqued ailanthus seeds,
The crisp pine flyers that flutter
Like soft moths down the sky;

Told you how Fall winds bear
The tree seeds out, like airmailed letters,
To distant ground so, when they come up later,
They may find, possibly,
The rain they need, some sun and air,
Far from the parent tree.

They threw my letters out.
They said I had probably forgotten.
We have seen the sheen and glow of rotten
Wood, the glimmering being that consumes
The flesh of a dead trout.
We've been in livingrooms;

We have seen the dodder,
That parasitic pale love-vine that thrives
Coiling the zinnias in the ardor
Of its close embrace.

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We have seen men abase
Themselves to their embittered wives;

And I have let you see my mother.
That old sow in her sty
Who would devour her farrow;
We have seen my sister in her narrow
Grave. Without love we die;
With love we kill each other.

You are afraid, now, of dying;
Sick with change and loss;
You think of your own self lying
Still in the ground while someone takes your room.
Today, you felt the small life toss
In your step-mother's womb.

I sit here with you in the summer's lull
By the lost handkerchiefs of lovers
To tell you when your brother
Will be born; how, and why.
I tell you love is possible.
We have to try.

Vuillard: The Mother and Sister of the Artist

(Instructions for the Visit)

Admire, when you come here, the glimmering hair
Of the girl; praise her pale
Complexion. Think well of her dress
Though that is somewhat out of fashion.
Don't try to take her hand, but smile for
Her hesitant gentleness

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Say the old woman is looking strong
Today; such hardiness. Remark,
Perhaps, how she has dressed herself black
Like a priest, and wears that sufficient air
That does become the righteous.
As you approach, she will push back
Her chair, shove away her plate
And wait,
Sitting squat and direct, before
The red mahogany chest
Massive as some great
Safe; will wait,
By the table and her greasy plate,
The bone half-chewed, her wine half-drained;
She will wait. And fix her steady
Eyes on you—the straight stare
Of an old politician.
Try once to meet her eyes. But fail.
Let your sight
Drift—yet never as if hunting for
The keys (which you keep imagining) hung
By her belt. (They are not there.)
Watch, perhaps, that massive chest—the way
It tries to lean
Forward, toward her, till it seems to rest
Its whole household's weight
Of linens and clothing and provisions
All on her stiff back.
It might be strapped there like the monstrous pack
Of some enchanted pedlar. Dense, self-contained,
Like mercury in a ball,
She can support this without strain,
Yet she grows smaller, wrinkling
Like a potato, parched as dung;
It cramps her like a fist.
Ask no one why the chest
Has no knobs. Betray
No least suspicion
The necessities within

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Could vanish at her
Will. Try not to think
That as she feeds, gains
Specific gravity,
She shrinks, light-
less as the world's
Hard core
And the per-
spective drains
In her.
Finally, above all,
You must not ever see,
Or let slip one hint that you can see,
On the other side, the girl's
Cuffs, like cordovan restraints;
Forget her bony, tentative wrist,
The half-fed, worrying eyes, and how
She backs out, bows, and tries to bow
Out of the scene, grows too ethereal
To make a shape inside her dress
And the dress itself is beginning already
To sublime itself away like a vapor
That merges into the empty twinkling
Of the air and of the bright wallpaper.

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MAUREEN HOWARD

Bridgeport Bus

First I will write:

When I go home, I walk through all the dim two-family house streets where the colors are brown and grey with what they call cream trim. On the route I take—eight-thirty in the morning, five at night—there are four houses which are repainted in pastels, pink and pale green, with aluminum around the doors; the windows and their front stoops are faced with quarter-inch fake stone. When my nerves are raw from the meaningless day at work I see nothing more than four ugly houses, their vulgar shapes, their sameness, defined by the light colors and bright metal. On better days I think these houses have beauty, reflect some hope shared by the Italians who own them: I suppose their blank painted faces would look fine in the Mediterranean sun or in a summer town on the Long Island shore.

I turn to walk up the hill where I live—here the dark houses are equally bad, though they are presumed to be better, with an extra bedroom in each flat and the upstairs flat bulged out over the downstairs porch. When I look up the hill there are dirty window eyes and huge indolent growths on each idiot brow, a row of monster heads to greet me. I turn back and see the city stretched out dead at my feet. I think about New York or San Francisco or Paris, the scene in which young Gide (it's the first entry in his journals) looks down on beautiful and mist-grey Paris across the imaginary writing desk of an artist. I started that book but something happened, my brother's children, my mother's gall bladder, something happened so I never finished. The actor says: "You see all that down there," (panorama of city at night), "all that," he says to Rita Hayworth, "will be yours." When I look down I see my city on the banks of the exhausted Naugatuck. There is a line of rust along the shore that smells of rubber—the gardens, if I may be allowed, of factories, and then the hills with all the streets of brown houses coming up towards me and towards my street of superior brown houses.

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When I go home my mother and I play a cannibal game; we eat each other over the years, tender morsel by morsel, until there is nothing left but dry bone and wig. She is winning—needless to say has had so much more experience—she meets me in the front room, hiding behind the evening paper, a fat self-indulgent body, her starved mind hungry for me. I am on guard when I first come from work—what means has she devised during the day for devouring me? I stand under the dark-stained arch, an anxious thrill rising in me, and just wait, watching but not seeing the elephant chairs and my bloated old mother behind her paper. This room, stuffed with darkness, day or night, any season, is a monochrome of immobility; heavy chairs, lame tables, parchment shades and curtains of ecru lace, all colorless as time—all under a layer of antediluvian silt. Arrangement in grey and black, portrait of my mother profiled, soft and bulky in her sagging chair: a big Irishwoman full of life with eyes ready to cry. For contrast, her white hair crimped in a prim and Protestant roll, seen against the walls (a deeper tone) papered in potato skins. A coat of yellow varnish, the years of our aboriginal love, over the entire picture. I have not long to wait, contemplating the classic scene of home, for she speaks up right away.

"Ag?" she says, not looking at me, and I don't answer, but I entertain myself with the notion that one day it will be someone else come in the front door, a rapist or a mad killer and she'll be caught there reading the obituaries or the society page or looking up her TV programs for the night. "Ag, I bought snow-suits today for the children downtown."

"In April? That's fine."

"On sale, Ag. Sometimes I don't think you use your head. There's been sales advertised downtown all week. I bought them big for next year." She smiles at me, puffy and red in the face, self-satisfied, imitating all the well-to-do Irish.

"I don't read that paper. How much?" I ask.

"Well, that's it—only twenty dollars," mother says.

"Sixty dollars?"

"Yes, for *three* children. I guess I can multiply as well as you Mary Agnes." Then she's had enough and pushes herself out of the chair to waddle off and get supper.

"Sixty dollars," I say after her, "and what's wrong with the ones

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you bought last year, not on sale. Can't they pass the clothes on? Can't Catherine wear Patrick's snowsuit? I didn't know a goddamn girl's coat buttoned from right to left when I was their age."

"I don't like to hear you talk that way, Mary Agnes." And then she will say, hurt to wrench my heart; and it works every time—my heart *is* wrenched looking at her raw face, tears swelling. Her blood pressure is up, "Your father, rest his soul, was poor. It's a sad thing, Ag, when you've no more feeling left for your brother and his family way up there in Buffalo. It doesn't matter about me, but it's sad."

We never get more violent than that. I am cursed with gentility and can hardly do better than an occasional name of the Lord in vain, but after each argument I like to look at myself in my own room or in the blue glass mirror in the dining room. There I can see what part of me she has picked at—her favorite soft flesh around the eyes or my shamefully concave chest. I am gaunt, you might guess it, five-foot eleven, one-hundred and eighteen pounds. But why do I start with such heightened drama when there are the usual tidbits: my mail is opened, my bureau drawers re-arranged, Clorox put in the machine with a new dress, or: "Ag?" (Once again it is only me, not the sex maniac I dream of, and she goes on at me behind the paper). "Christine Doyle called about the Sodality Tea and she said wouldn't you pour. Isn't that nice?"

"And you said yes?"

"Yes, isn't that nice." Then she is wise enough to hurry right on and read me something out of the paper: "Well poor Tom Heffernan died, that's a blessing. They say his body was full of it."

You will think now that I am stupid and incompetent, but you would be surprised how I can gnaw at my mother just by reading for hours, or not speaking, or muttering "Christ" in the direction of the television set as I pass through the front room. And, my choicest bone of contention, I take night courses every year instead of making myself one bit attractive to the gelded, balding boys that my mother is able to find in limitless supply. "Tess Mueller is coming over with that nice son who works in the bank," she announces from behind her paper. I get a quick flash of Fred Mueller, a harmless pudding-beast caged at the People's Trust, counting out my money and saying; "Cold enough for you?" or, "Long time no see."

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"That's a shame," I tell my mother, "because I'm going to the library in New Haven tonight."

"The library, the *library*—" shrieks of coronary outrage.

"The University, mother. Hundreds of men."

But she is gasping now and slaps her beloved *Evening American* against the brown velour chair. "That's what I'm to tell Tess when she brings that nice boy, that you've gone to the *library*?"

"Oh, you'd be surprised—hundreds of men . . ." But never use even the simplest sarcasm on children because they don't get it, and I wonder if I should illustrate my point for mother: maybe a story about a nun, a Sister of Mercy, working on Cardinal Newman in the stack; she meets up with an emeritus professor, a medievalist who has just been writing a piece on the clerical orgies at Cluny. Scene: the Sterling Memorial Library in the *9860.2n*'s. Time: four o'clock in the week of Septuagesima. It is a moment of transition and the lights have not yet been turned on. . . .

Mother smooths out the newspaper, folds it, tucks it under her arm with finality: she is finished, through with me. "Ag," she says, "you are thirty-five years old."

This is her master stroke. What I should have written to begin with is that I am Mary Agnes Keely, a thirty-five year old virgin. All narrative should begin with essentials, instead of the oblique device—picture of a city, a house—that flirts with the truth in a maidenly way. I am called Ag, named Mary after guess who and Agnes after the child martyr. She defended her virginity before it had even a literary value, so I have never had much sympathy with her. At the age of thirteen can you honestly say there is a choice—I mean between a lion and a dirty, nasty man. I can not believe in a world which honors that prissy little girl, and dishonors me as no more than one of a million social misfits, and lets me be fed daily to my ravenous old mother. "Ag," she will say, her mouth watering, "you are thirty-five years old."

As I write this I am calm for the first time in years, sitting at my dressing table where I can look at myself often, and I admire the freshness that has come to my cheeks this evening and what seems to be a new firm quality to my throat. I have laid out a thick pad of yellow theme paper and with a smooth, satisfying ball point pen I have begun to write. I can hear my mother at the telephone out in the kitchen. She is whining, aggrieved, to the long distance

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operator and is asking again, the fifth time in the hour, if the girl will dial her son in Buffalo. My brother and his family don't seem to be at home; that's the straw, she tells my Aunt Mae in a lengthy call, that broke the camel's back in her already broken heart. She has told her sad story to Aunt Mae and to her younger sister Aunt Lil. From what I can overhear, Aunt Lil will be over after supper, done up in her ranch mink stole, to talk to me and try to straighten things out, though nothing is tangled as far as I'm concerned—things are straighter than they have ever been, and I intend to set the whole scene down on my pleasant yellow pad.

It is spring now, but nine weeks ago tonight it was winter, the beginning of February. I came in from the wet gloom of the brown streets to the shriveled gloom of our house—there was mother with the *Evening American,* but she didn't ask who it was standing under the arch, so immediately I knew there was to be an announcement on a grand scale.

"Is it still raining, Ag?" she asked, sweetness itself.

"Yes," I said.

Then she put down the paper so I could see that she had been to the Edna-Lou Beauty Shop. Her hair had a fresh rinse of purple and was kinked in to the head. She was wearing her best stylish-stout wine crêpe with a surplice top, and her new Enna Jettick shoes. "Well, wouldn't you just know," my mother said with false petulance, "wouldn't you just know it would rain tonight." She waited, preening out her fat bosom, but I wouldn't ask, so she heaved out of the chair, "Dinner is almost on the table. We have to eat early tonight, Ag, because of the novena."

"The novena!" I said. Her backside looked broader than ever as she hustled out to the kitchen. Ever since I was a girl, for over twenty years that would be, I had to drag my mother to that novena in the winter, tugging her up the church steps like an impossible rolled mattress and stuffing her into a pew. Then the Rosary, the Aspirations, the Benediction, the Prayer for Peace . . . the whole thing started just before the war and was addressed to Our Lady of Fatima who, as I recall, appeared to some prepubescent Portuguese and said the world was coming to an end —as though that were news. So off to the novena and afterwards from St. Augustine's to Friedman's Dairy with the Scanlan sisters, Aunt Mae, and a toothy school teacher named Louise Conroy,

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there to reap the reward: heavenly hot fudge sundaes, topped with whipped cream, and a symposium on every hysterectomy in town. Unfortunately, when the novena was four-ninths or five-ninths over it coincided with Lent, so that my mother and her friends would stand in the back of the church and debate about going to Friedman's, but they always went, denying themselves nuts and whipped cream to commemorate the forty days and forty nights in the desert. Nine weeks ago tonight the novena began.

"I've put your dinner out," my mother called and I walked slowly out to the kitchen. She had already settled herself behind a dish of glutinous brown stew.

"I have my course tonight, mother." *En route* I had switched from the Spenser-Milton seminar which was to be given on Friday evenings to Modern French Poetry.

"You have what?" Poor mother, she saw I was serious.

I sat down opposite her, just as loose and easy, and said, "My French course. It comes on Thursdays."

"God knows," she started her harangue right away, "you were brought up a good Catholic girl that you should choose a lot of dirty French books over your religion. And thank the good Lord," (with a tremolo), "your father is not here to see you an ingrate to your mother . . . a woman the age of you, Mary Agnes, thirty-five years old . . ." and on and on with a sad scum forming on her stew. She looked hateful with all the veins jumping in her face, yet I almost cried, out of a perverse love for her ravings. I was consumed, ready to say yes I would go with her and try to stop the end of the world, but she said: "I will pray for you, Mary Agnes," with her lips all pursed up. That was new, as though she were sucking the marrow out of my bones, and for eight weeks I have heard it—how she is praying for me, for a woman who would let her old mother go down the slippery hills and up the church steps alone at night.

It must have been her praying for me that started me on the pastel houses. I had to have something to come back with after all. Three or four times a week when I came in from work, I told my mother about the Italian houses, the houses that are painted pink and pale green. I would mention how gay they look on a rainy day or remark what a lovely aluminum curlycued C the Capizzolis had put on their front door, or how I admired the Riccios'

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empty urn, a cemetery urn painted red, standing in front of their peachy pink house. And all the while I had no knowledge, I will swear to it, that I was provoking her more than usual. Yes, I was nibbling! And there were the expected retorts about foreigners—"They weren't stupid. They knew how to improve their property." But when I told her I liked the Italian houses it was only partially true. I had come to love them. I left the house early to hurry down my street and around the corner to the first one, the Marcuccis', who had left corrugated metal awnings up all winter long waiting for sun, and then on to the Riccios' splendid red urn that promised to have flowers and to the Capizzolis' with all the twisted aluminum and the pressed stone that had no geological limitations. A few grey blocks on, near my office, was the last house—I don't know the people—a three-family aqua wonder with glass bricks set around each window to modernize it and the front yard cemented up except for a small patch of dirt the shape of an irrigation pan. There some hardy ivy grew all winter, green. It was an oasis that I rushed to, and one day I walked into the cement yard and picked an ivy leaf. The urn, the awnings, the ivy remembered another season, though I suppose it was the future that I really admired in them, because I had none.

One night I said to my mother, "That's how I get to work and back, from one bright house to the next. I think lots of people go on that way, from one bowling night to the next, or even from meal to meal."

I thought she hadn't heard—she hardly ever did when I explained things—but later by the blue light of the television set she said, "You used to be a good, plain girl, Ag. I can't see what's changed you."

I bought a red silk dress at this time and let my hair grow. At the office they all said how snappy Miss Ag was looking—there I command respect for seventeen years as a cheerful drudge. I am secretary to the president of the Standard Zipper Company. Everyone knows the type, a pinch-faced lady, supports an old mother, can locate every paper clip and advise her boss not to merge with Reddi-Zip, Inc. It makes the salesmen laugh to say I know all the ups and downs. It is pathetic . . . I think of a million flies all over America, zip, zip, zip down the trolley—miners, truck drivers, farmers, junior executives, Hollywood stars—never an embarrass-

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ing moment, due to the efficiency and diligence of Mary Agnes Keely. I think of the harassed women catching their flesh . . . you must never hurry it, *I* know that . . . and the tossing babies kept warm for the night and the suitcases and tents and silver bags, everything is closing and opening like breath going in and out, while I am sealed—as though our 72-inch model were stitched into me from the toes up and the zipper stuck forever on a broken track under my hawk-Irish nose. It's pathetic, but funny.

I mentioned the dress, the novena naturally, and I shall want to write about my course. My brother went to college, but after my father died my mother took the money that was meant for me and bought our wen-browed dark house so that we would always have a roof over our empty heads. I started filing at Standard Zipper and taking courses at night, and I discovered that being a homely gawk, I was smart. Well, I was smarter than anyone at the Teacher's College and as smart as the Saturday morning crowd at Columbia. I have a world now, about the size of a circle of light thrown by a desk lamp, that is mine and safe from my mother and the zipper company and my brother's children. It is the one space in which I am free of self-pity and I hold it sacred like some impossible belief in guardian angels, because when I am outside of the circle of light I can see that it is dim and small. Someone is always saying how fine it is and what a mark of maturity to be able to think, to read; but I'm sure it is cowardice for most people. I mean that we should want to stand in an amphitheatre with spotlights on us, like F. D. R. in a black cape, and say something significant: "at last, my friends, we know the world can come to an end."

Well, my small circle of light, the reading lamp, had been shining with special brightness since the beginning of February because of my course in the modern French poets—they spoke to me. That happens now and again, even when you become a sophisticated reader with all kinds of critical impedimenta: you read something that is so direct, so pertinent to exactly where you are—the way you feel and your precise frame of mind. That is the rapport I had—I still do have—with Nerval, with Baudelaire, with Rimbaud. Not only what they say in brilliant, disparate images but with their diseased, eccentric lives. I feel pain where I have never been touched, dissipation in my early-to-bed soul. (Have I written an Illumination?)

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(My mother has got through to my brother in Buffalo. She has only to hear his voice to cry, so what must it be tonight, an ancient keening racially remembered that cannot stop. I wonder if she will ask me to talk to him, way up there in Buffalo. "Hello," I will say, "how are you? How are the kids? Yes," I will say, "everything is fine here. The weather is fine. I am going away." She is wailing. She will not ask me to speak to him on the phone, but no matter where I may go I will get the bill . . . I always pay. If I were to leave my room and see my mother leaning heavily on the refrigerator, daubing at her wet eyes and nose with a disintegrated Kleenex, weeping and weeping to the child she loves, my brother . . . then I could not go. I would offer myself to her, the last sweet bite, a soupçon airy and delicious to restore her, humanity fudge. Warriors did that—not as long ago as we like to think—ate the heart of the enemy . . . I will stay in my room.)

Now let me tell you what has happened. I have told you about the red dress, the novena, the pastel houses and the French poets. Tonight I came home, a Thursday, and turned up the hill to my house. The scene was wrong: the weather had been fine all day, from the window of the zipper factory, and the sun still glowed, low and late on my dirty brown street, but there was a flash of electric blue—intense Immigrant Blue. Then I ran up the hill to my house, because it was *my* house with that cheap blue all over the front and half way down the side, and I ran up the steps, my feet sticking to the gluey wet paint. Inside there she was with the newspaper held up higher than usual, waiting for me. "Ag," she said, "is that you?"

"You know it's me," I shouted. "You know that." I tore the *Evening American* from her face. The smile she had prepared to greet me with was plastered on her speechless mouth. "You have gone out of your mind," I said evenly, "*out of your mind.*"

"Now, Mary Agnes, the painters came today . . ."

"The house is blue."

". . . the painters came today, Mary Agnes, and I had it in mind for a while with the house so run down, and I wanted to do something for you, something to please you, Ag."

"The house is blue."

"Well that's it." Her voice rose an octave—her face was flushed. "You've been talking up those houses the Italians own for weeks

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now, every day it seems you're at me about the colors and the decoration." Now she got up and began to gather the torn newspaper, stooping as best she could with the blood rushing to her head and those veins jumping faster than I have ever seen. "You've been plaguing me with those colored houses, but there is no pleasing you, Mary Agnes."

"In the first place we are not Italians," I said.

"Well you don't have to tell me," she screamed, "you're the big mixer, aren't you, with all your talk about those wops. . . . It wasn't me wanted the house blue."

"We are not Italians," I said again—and in a whisper: "We are withered brown people. Can't you see that? Can't you see one rotten thing?"

"No, I don't like the way you speak to your mother—out of dirty French books I've seen in your room. I bless the day your father died, not to see you like this, a heretic and a spiteful woman."

I grabbed her fat arm when she turned from me and held her. "Now tell me," I said, "how much does it cost to paint a house?"

But she only started to cry, so that I had to answer. "It's my bank account, isn't it?—spread all over the front of this house."

"You'd go off and leave your mother to die, Mary Agnes." Then I saw the working of her voracious mind. Her words grated through the sobs, "You've no more feeling than stone; you'd go off to Europe with the money, and let me walk up to church in the winter and go off in the summer and leave me alone, all alone when I chose that color for you."

Then *I* began to cry and threw myself into an elephant chair. "For me. For me. That is the color for your Holy Mary. Must the whole street know, the whole city that I am a virgin and thirty-five." I pounded the bulky chair thinking it was my mother's body. She must have felt I was wild—staring up at her with my ravaged face. I was suddenly smiling and sure. "All this," I said pleasantly looking around the front room, "has no importance." My mother thought I meant only our house. "Now I am going to play Bridgeport Bus, once and for all I am going to play Bridgeport Bus and I will go away." (It is a wonderful game, Bridgeport Bus: you line up the dining room chairs in two aisles and you collect fares and joggle along through the Naugatuck valley talk-

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ing to all the passengers and then get off at Bridgeport.) Mother went out weeping into the kitchen, but I stayed there hugging the large bosom back of the chair.

Aunt Lil has come and gone. She stuck her head into my room and seeing that I was calm, writing on my yellow pad, she went to comfort my mother, saying, I imagine, that it was one of our arguments like any other. Then I could hear mother, loud and choking to Aunt Lil that she would not finish her novena tonight. She is too ill from the exertion and all the shouting. Oh, M. Rimbaud—"This can only be the end of the world, kept going." It is obvious that I will not finish my course . . . no matter.

I intend to travel light, only the red silk dress, some books, my cosmetics, though my face has a surprising fullness and the skin on my neck seems tight, like the skin of an out-of-season, hothouse fruit. I am like that, maturing too late, therefore I may be more valuable . . . that is one of the questions to be asked, still unplucked. My girlish head luxuriates in absurd decisions: I will take the Bridgeport Bus and joggle to the railroad station and then choose between Boston and New York. I may take my rhinestone earrings or I may leave them behind. Shall I call a taxi to take me to the bus depot or shall I walk so that I can see for the last time my obscure, night-dark city with its hills rising—unlit funeral pyres, grey and brown, rising from the beach of industrial rubble . . . and the river used up, ashamed like a deserted woman. "So long!" I will say, "You have loved me like a mother. I take nothing from you but the bare necessities; one suitcase, the beginning of this story. So long, sweet Mother, good-night, good-night.

The wise boy Rimbaud writes: "The hour of flight will be the hour of death for me." Let me establish that I *know* this as concretely as I comprehend a world of zippers. So having cleared myself of some naiveté, I have only to put on my coat and go—through the living room where my mother is soothed at last by her television, watching lives much more professional than ours. "Let's not say good-bye, only *Adieu, bon appétit. . . .*"

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YVES BONNEFOY

Du Mouvement et de l'Immobilité de Douve

Mais la vie de l'esprit ne s'effraie point devant la mort et n'est pas celle qui s'en garde pure. Elle est la vie qui la supporte et se maintient en elle.
—*Hegel.*

THÉATRE

I

Je te voyais courir sur des terrasses,
Je te voyais lutter contre le vent,
Le froid saignait sur tes lèvres.

Et je t'ai vue te rompre et jouir d'être morte ô plus belle
Que la foudre, quand elle tache les vitres blanches de ton sang.

II

L'été vieillissant te gerçait d'un plaisir monotone, nous méprisions l'ivresse imparfaite de vivre.

« Plutôt le lierre, disais-tu, l'attachement du lierre aux pierres de sa nuit : présence sans issue, visage sans racine.

« Dernière vitre heureuse que l'ongle solaire déchire, plutôt dans la montagne ce village où mourir.

« Plutôt ce vent... »

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Translated by GALWAY KINNELL

On the Motion and the Immobility of Douve

> Now the life of the spirit does not cringe in front of death nor keep itself pure from its ravage. It supports death and maintains itself in it.
>
> —*Hegel*

THEATRE

I

I saw you run on terraces,
I saw you struggle against the wind,
The coldness bled on your lips.

And I have seen you break yourself and be glad of your death,
O more beautiful
Than lightning, when it stains the white windows of your blood.

II

The dying summer frostbit you with a monotonous pleasure, we despised the imperfect joy of living.

"Rather the ivy," you said, "the clinging of ivy to the stone of its night: presence without issue, face without roots.

"Last happy windowpane ripped by the sun's claws, rather in the mountains this village to die in.

"Rather this wind. . ."

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III

Il s'agissait d'un vent plus fort que nos mémoires,
Stupeur des robes et cri des rocs — et tu passais devant
ces flammes
La tête quadrillée les mains fendues et toute
En quête de la mort sur les tambours exultants de tes
gestes.

C'était jour de tes seins
Et tu régnais enfin absente de ma tête.

IV

Je me réveille, il pleut. Le vent te pénètre, Douve, lande résineuse endormie près de moi. Je suis sur une terrasse, dans un trou de la mort. De grands chiens de feuillages tremblent.

Le bras que tu soulèves, soudain, sur une porte, m'illumine à travers les âges. Village de braise, à chaque instant je te vois naître, Douve,

A chaque instant mourir.

V

Le bras que l'on soulève et le bras que l'on tourne
Ne sont d'un même instant que pour nos lourdes têtes,
Mais rejetés ces draps de verdure et de boue
Il ne reste qu'un feu du royaume de mort.

La jambe démeublée où le grand vent pénètre
Poussant devant lui des têtes de pluie
Ne vous éclairera qu'au seuil de ce royaume,
Gestes de Douve, gestes déjà plus lents, gestes noirs.

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III

It was about a wind stronger than our memories,
Stupor of dresses and cry of rocks—and you passed in front
of these flames,
Head graphpapered, hands split open, wholly
Seeking death on the exulting drums of your gestures.

It was day of your breasts
And you were reigning at last absent from my head.

IV

I awake, it rains. The wind pierces you, Douve, resinous heath sleeping near me. I am on a terrace, in a pit of death. Huge dogs of leafage tremble.

The arm you lift, suddenly, on a door, lights me across the ages. Village of embers, each instant I see you being born, Douve,

Each instant dying.

V

The arm that is lifted and the arm that is turned
Are of the same instant only for our heavy heads,
But these coverings of verdure and mud thrown back,
All that is left is a fire in death's kingdom.

The dismantled leg pierced by the high wind
Which drives heads of rain before it
Will not light you until the threshold of this kingdom,
Gestures of Douve, gestures already slower, black gestures.

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VI

Quelle pâleur te frappe, rivière souterraine, quelle artère en toi se rompt, où l'écho retentit de ta chute ?

Ce bras que tu soulèves soudain s'ouvre, s'enflamme. Ton visage recule. Quelle brume croissante m'arrache ton regard? Lente falaise d'ombre, frontière de la mort.

Des bras muets t'accueillent, arbres d'une autre rive.

VII

Blessée confuse dans les feuilles,
Mais prise par le sang de pistes qui se perdent,
Complice encor du vivre.

Je t'ai vue ensablée au terme de ta lutte
Hésiter aux confins du silence et de l'eau,
Et la bouche souillée des dernières étoiles
Rompre d'un cri l'horreur de veiller dans ta nuit.

O dressant dans l'air dur soudain comme une roche
Un beau geste de houille.

VIII

La musique saugrenue commence dans les mains, dans les genoux, puis c'est la tête qui craque, la musique s'affirme sous les lèvres, sa certitude pénètre le versant souterrain du visage.

A présent se disloquent les menuiseries faciales. A présent l'on procède à l'arrachement de la vue.

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VI

What pallor strikes you, underground river, what artery breaks in you, where the echo of your falling resounds?

This arm you lift suddenly opens, catches fire. Your face draws back. What thickening mist wrenches your gaze from me? Slow cliff of shadows, frontier of death.

Mute arms greet you, trees of another shore.

VII

Wounded one, confounded among the leaves,
But caught by the blood of fading paths,
Accomplice yet of life.

I have seen you, quicksanded at your struggle's end,
Falter at the limits of silence and water,
And, mouth sullied by the last stars,
Break off with a cry the horrible nightwatch.

O raising in air hard suddenly as rock
A beautiful gesture of coal.

VIII

The absurd music begins in the hands, in the knees, then there is the cracking in the head, the music grows loud under the lips, its certainty penetrates the underslope of the face.

Now the woodwork of the face is taken apart. Now begins the tearing out of the sight.

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IX

Blanche sous un plafond d'insectes, mal éclairée, de profil
Et ta robe tachée du venin des lampes,
Je te découvre étendue,
Ta bouche plus haute qu'un fleuve se brisant au loin sur
la terre.

Être défait que l'être invincible rassemble,
Présence ressaisie dans la torche du froid,
O guetteuse toujours je te découvre morte
Douve disant Phénix je veille dans ce froid.

X

Je vois Douve étendue. Au plus haut de l'espace charnel je l'entends bruire. Les princes-noirs hâtent leurs mandibules à travers cet espace où les mains de Douve se développent, os défaits de leur chair se muant en toile grise que l'araignée massive éclaire.

XI

Couverte de l'humus silencieux du monde,
Parcourue des rayons d'une araignée vivante,
Déjà soumise au devenir du sable
Et tout écartelée secrète connaissance.

Parée pour une fête dans le vide
Et les dents découvertes comme pour l'amour,

Fontaine de ma mort présente insoutenable.

XII

Je vois Douve étendue. Dans la ville écarlate de l'air, où combattent les branches sur son visage, où des racines trouvent leur chemin dans son corps — elle rayonne une joie stridente d'insectes, une musique affreuse

Au pas noir de la terre, Douve ravagée, exultante, rejoint la lampe noueuse des plateaux.

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IX

White under a ceiling of insects, poorly lit, in profile,
Your dress stained by the venom of lamps,
I find you stretched out,
Your mouth higher than a river breaking far away on the earth.

Broken being whom the invincible being puts together again,
Presence possessed again in the torch of cold,
O watcher, always I find you dead,
Douve saying Phoenix I wait in this cold.

X

I see Douve stretched out. At the topmost point of bodily space I hear her rustling. The black-princes hurry their mandibles across the space where Douve's hands unfold, their unfleshed bones turning into gray webs which the massive spider lights.

XI

Covered by the silent humus of the world,
Webbed over by a living spider's rays,
Already undergoing the change into sand,
And cut to pieces, secret knowledge.

Adorned for a festival in the void,
And teeth bared as if for love,

Fountain of my death, with me, unbearable.

XII

I see Douve stretched out. In the scarlet city of air, where branches battle across her face, where roots find their way into her body—she radiates a joy strident with insects, a frightful music.

To the black tread of the earth, Douve, ravaged and exultant, returns to the gnarled lamp of the plateaus.

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XIII

Ton visage ce soir éclairé par la terre,
Mais je vois tes yeux se corrompre
Et le mot visage n'a plus de sens.

La mer intérieure éclairée d'aigles tournants,
Ceci est une image.
Je te détiens froide à une profondeur où les images ne prennent plus.

XIV

Je vois Douve étendue. Dans une pièce blanche, les yeux cernés de plâtre, bouche vertigineuse et les mains condamnées à l'herbe luxuriante qui l'envahit de toutes parts.

La porte s'ouvre. Un orchestre s'avance. Et des yeux à facettes, des thorax pelucheux, des têtes froides à becs, à mandibules, l'inondent.

XV

O douée d'un profil où s'acharne la terre
Je te vois disparaître.

L'herbe nue sur tes lèvres et l'éclat du silex
Inventent ton dernier sourire,

Science profonde où se calcine
Le vieux bestiaire cérébral.

XVI

Demeure d'un feu sombre où convergent nos pentes ! Sous ses voûtes je te vois luire, Douve immobile, prise dans le filet vertical de la mort.

Douve géniale, renversée : au pas des soleils dans l'espace funèbre, elle accède lentement aux étages inférieurs.

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XIII

Your face tonight lighted by the earth,
But I see your eyes' corruption
And the word face makes no sense any more.

The interior sea lighted by turning eagles,
This is an image,
I hold you cold at a depth where images do not take
any more.

XIV

I see Douve stretched out. In a white room, eyes dark-circled with plaster, mouth dizzy, and hands condemned to the luxuriant grass invading her on all sides.

The door opens. An orchestra advances. And faceted eyes, woolly thoraxes, cold heads beaked and pincered, flood over her.

XV

O gifted with a profile in which the earth strives
I see you disappearing.

On your lips naked grass and flintsparks
Invent your last smile,

Deep knowledge in which
The old bestiary of the mind burns to ashes.

XVI

Dwelling-place of a dark fire where our slopes converge! Under its vaults I see you glimmer, motionless Douve, caught in the vertical net of death.

Superlative Douve, overthrown: to the march of suns through funeral space, she accedes slowly to the lower levels.

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XVII

Le ravin pénètre dans la bouche maintenant,
Les cinq doigts se dispersent en hasards de forêt maintenant,
La tête première coule entre les herbes maintenant,
La gorge se farde de neige et de loups maintenant,
Les yeux ventent sur quels passagers de la mort et c'est nous
dans ce vent dans cette eau dans ce froid maintenant.

XVIII

Présence exacte qu'aucune flamme désormais ne saurait restreindre ; convoyeuse du froid secret ; vivante, de ce sang qui renaît et s'accroît où se déchire le poème,

Il fallait qu'ainsi tu parusses aux limites sourdes, et d'un site funèbre où ta lumière empire, que tu subisses l'épreuve.

O plus belle et la mort infuse dans ton rire! J'ose à présent te rencontrer, je soutiens l'éclat de tes gestes.

XIX

Au premier jour du froid notre tête s'évade
Comme un prisonnier fuit dans l'ozone majeur,
Mais Douve d'un instant cette flèche retombe
Et brise sur le sol les palmes de sa tête.

Ainsi avions-nous cru réincarner nos gestes,
Mais la tête niée nous buvons une eau froide,
Et des liasses de mort pavoisent ton sourire,
Ouverture tentée dans l'épaisseur du monde.

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XVII

The ravine enters the mouth now,
The five fingers disperse in casual woods now,
The original head flows among the grasses now,
The breast paints itself with snow and wolves now,
The eyes blow on which of death's passengers and it is
we in this wind in this water in this cold now.

XVIII

Exact presence whom no flame thereafter could restrain; bearer of secret coldness; living, by that blood that is born again and grows where the poem tears apart.

It was necessary for you to appear, thus, at the deaf limits, and to undergo the ordeal of that land of death where your light increases.

O most beautiful, with death in your laughter! I dare now to meet you, now I can face your gestures' flashing.

XIX

On the first day of cold our head escapes,
Like a prisoner into the higher air,
But, Douve of one instant, that arrow falls
And the palm of its head breaks on the ground.

Thus we had dreamed of reincarnating our gestures
But the head gainsaid we drink a cold water,
And bankrolls of death deck your smiles with flags,
Attempted rift in the thickness of the world.

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DERNIERS GESTES

Aux Arbres

Vous qui vous êtes effacés sur son passage,
Qui avez refermé sur elle vos chemins,
Impassibles garants que Douve même morte
Sera lumière encore n'étant rien.

Vous fibreuse matière et densité,
Arbres, proches de moi quand elle s'est jetée
Dans la barque des morts et la bouche serrée
Sur l'obole de faim, de froid et de silence.

J'entends à travers vous quel dialogue elle tente
Avec les chiens, avec l'informe nautonier,
Et je vous appartiens par son cheminement
A travers tant de nuit et malgré tout ce fleuve.

Le tonnerre profond qui roule sur vos branches,
Les fêtes qu'il enflamme au sommet de l'été
Signifient qu'elle lie sa fortune à la mienne
Dans la médiation de votre austérité.

*

Que saisir sinon qui s'échappe,
Que voir sinon qui s'obscurcit,
Que désirer sinon qui meurt,
Sinon qui parle et se déchire ?

Parole proche de moi
Que chercher sinon ton silence,
Quelle lueur sinon profonde
Ta conscience ensevelie,

Parole jetée matérielle
Sur l'origine et la nuit ?

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LAST GESTURES

To the Trees

You who stood aside as she passed,
Who closed your avenues behind her,
Impassive witnesses that Douve even dead
Will still be light, being nothing.

You fibrous matter and density,
Trees, close to me when she threw herself
Into the boat of the dead, her mouth closed tight
On the obolus of hunger, of cold, and of silence.

Through you I hear the dialogue she ventures
With the dogs, with the shapeless oarsman,
And I am made part of you by her traversing
Of so much night in spite of all this river.

The deep thunder which rolls on your branches,
The festivals it ignites on the summit of summer
Mean that she ties her destiny to mine
Through the mediation of your austerity.

*

What shall I grasp if not what slips away,
What shall I see if not what grows dark,
What shall I desire if not what is dying,
If not what speaks and shreds itself?

Word close to me,
What shall I seek if not your silence,
What gleam if not in the depths
Your buried consciousness,

Word, material span
Over origin and night?

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Le Seul Témoin

I
Ayant livré sa tête aux basses flammes
De la mer, ayant perdu ses mains
Dans son anxieuse profondeur, ayant jeté
Aux matières de l'eau sa chevelure ;
Étant morte, puisque mourir est ce chemin
De verticalité sous la lumière,
Et ivre encore étant morte : ô je fus,
Ménade consumée, dure joie mais perfide,
Le seul témoin, la seule bête prise
Dans ces rets de ta mort que furent sables
Ou rochers ou chaleur, ton signe disais-tu.

II
Elle fuit vers les saules ; le sourire
Des arbres l'enveloppe, simulant
La joie simple d'un jeu. Mais la lumière
Est sombre sur ses mains de suppliante,
Et le feu vient laver sa face, emplir sa bouche
Et rejeter son corps dans le gouffre des saules.

O t'abîmant du flanc de la table osirienne
Dans les eaux de la mort !
Une dernière fois de tes seins
Éclairant les convives.
Mais répandant le jour de ta tête glacée
Sur la stérilité des sites infernaux.

III
Le peu d'espace entre l'arbre et le seuil
Suffit pour que tu t'élances encore et que tu meures
Et que je croie revivre à la lumière
D'ombrages que tu fus.

Et que j'oublie
Ton visage criant sur chaque mur,
O Ménade peut-être réconciliée
Avec tant d'ombre heureuse sur la pierre.

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The Only Witness

I
Having surrendered her head to the low flames
Of the sea, having lost her hands
In its anxious depths, having thrown
Her hair to the elements of water;
Being dead, since to die is this way
Of verticality under the light,
And drunk still, being dead: O I was,
Consumed Maenad, hard but perfidious joy,
The only witness, the only beast caught
In those nets of your death which were sand
Or rocks or heat, your sign you used to say.

II
She flees towards the willows; the smile
Of the trees envelops her, feigning
The simple joy of a game. But the light
On her supplicating hands is dark,
And the fire comes to wash her face, fill her mouth,
And throw back her body to the abyss of willows.

O sinking from the side of the Osirian feast
Into the waters of death!
A last time with your breasts
Lighting the company.
But pouring the daylight of your frozen head
On the sterility of the infernal shore.

III
The little space between the tree and the threshold
Is enough for you to begin again and to die,
And for me to think I live again in the light
Of the shades you used to be.

And for me to forget
Your face calling from every wall,
O Maenad reconciled perhaps
With so much shadow happy on the stone.

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IV
Es-tu vraiment morte ou joues-tu
Encore à simuler la pâleur et le sang,
O toi passionnément au sommeil qui te livres
Comme on ne sait que mourir ?

Es-tu vraiment morte ou joues-tu
Encore en tout miroir
A perdre ton reflet, ta chaleur et ton sang
Dans l'obscurcissement d'un visage immobile ?

V
Où maintenant est le cerf qui témoigna
Sous ces arbres de justice,
Qu'une route de sang par elle fut ouverte,
Un silence nouveau par elle inventé.

Portant sa robe comme lac de sable, comme froid,
Comme cerf pourchassé aux lisières,
Qu'elle mourut, portant sa robe la plus belle,
Et d'une terre vipérine revenue ?

VI
Sur un fangeux hiver, Douve, j'étendais
Ta face lumineuse et basse de forêt.
Tout se défait, pensai-je, tout s'éloigne.

Je te revis violente et riant sans retour,
De tes cheveux au soir d'opulentes saisons
Dissimuler l'éclat d'un visage livide.

Je te revis furtive. En lisière des arbres
Paraître comme un feu quand l'automne resserre
Tout le bruit de l'orage au cœur des frondaisons.

O plus noire et déserte ! Enfin je te vis morte,
Inapaisable éclair que le néant supporte,
Vitre sitôt éteinte, et d'obscure maison.

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IV
Are you really dead or are you still playing
At pretending the pallor and blood,
O you who passionately give yourself to sleep
In the way only used for dying?

Are you really dead or are you still playing
In every mirror
At losing your image, your warmth, your blood,
In the darkening of a motionless face?

V
Where now is the stag that witnessed
Under those trees of justice,
That she opened a roadway of blood,
That she invented a new silence.

That, wearing her dress like a lake of sand, like coldness,
Like a stag hunted into the fringes,
She died, wearing her most beautiful dress,
Come back from a viperous earth?

VI
Over a soiled winter, Douve, I spread out
Your forest-like face, luminous and low.
Everything falls, I thought, everything passes.

Again I saw you, violent and irretrievably laughing,
On the eve of opulent seasons concealing
With your hair the glare of a livid face.

Again I saw you, furtive. At the trees' edge
Appearing like a fire when the autumn compresses
The noise of storms into the heart of the foliage.

O most black and deserted! At last I saw you dead,
Unappeasable flash strung out on the void,
Window soon put out, of a dark house.

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Vrai Nom

Je nommerai désert ce château que tu fus,
Nuit cette voix, absence ton visage,
Et quand tu tomberas dans la terre stérile
Je nommerai néant l'éclair qui t'a porté.

Mourir est un pays que tu aimais. Je viens
Mais éternellement par tes sombres chemins.
Je détruis ton désir, ta forme, ta mémoire,
Je suis ton ennemi qui n'aura de pitié.

Je te nommerai guerre et je prendrai
Sur toi les libertés de la guerre et j'aurai
Dans mes mains ton visage obscur et traversé,
Dans mon cœur ce pays qu'illumine l'orage.

•

La lumière profonde a besoin pour paraître
D'une terre rouée et craquante de nuit.
C'est d'un bois ténébreux que la flamme s'exalte.
Il faut à la parole même une matière,
Un inerte rivage au delà de tout chant.

Il te faudra franchir la mort pour que tu vives,
La plus pure présence est un sang répandu.

Phénix

L'oiseau se portera au-devant de nos têtes,
Une épaule de sang pour lui se dressera.
Il fermera joyeux ses ailes sur le faîte
De cet arbre ton corps que tu lui offriras.

Il chantera longtemps s'éloignant dans les branches,
L'ombre viendra lever les bornes de son cri.
Refusant toute mort inscrite sur les branches
Il osera franchir les crêtes de la nuit.

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True Name

I will name desert the castle which you were,
Night your voice, absence your face,
And when you sink again into the sterile earth
I will name nothingness the lightning which bore you.

Dying is a country which you loved. I come
By your dark ways, but eternally.
I destroy your desire, your form, your memory,
I am your enemy who will not have pity.

I will name you war and I will take
The liberties of war with you and I will have
Your dark, pierced face in my hands,
And in my heart this land which the storm lights.

*

In order to appear the deep light needs
A soil broken and cracking with night.
It is from dark wood that the flame leaps.
The word itself needs substance,
An inert shore beyond all singing.

You will have to pass through death to live,
The purest presence is spilled blood.

Phoenix

A bird will appear before our heads,
A shoulder of blood will be lifted for it.
It will fold its wings joyfully on the peak
Of this tree your body which you will offer it.

It will sing a long time going away in the branches,
The shadows will come erasing the boundaries of its cry.
Refusing all death written on the branches
It will dare pass through the crests of night.

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*

Cette pierre ouverte est-ce toi, ce logis dévasté,
Comment peut-on mourir ?

J'ai apporté de la lumière, j'ai cherché,
Partout régnait le sang.
Et je criais et je pleurais de tout mon corps.

Vrai Corps

Close la bouche et lavé le visage,
Purifié le corps, enseveli
Ce destin éclairant dans la terre du verbe,
Et le mariage le plus bas s'est accompli.

Tue cette voix qui criait à ma face
Que nous étions hagards et séparés,
Murés ces yeux : et je tiens Douve morte
Dans l'âpreté de soi avec moi refermée.

Et si grand soit le froid qui monte de ton être,
Si brûlant soit le gel de notre intimité,
Douve, je parle en toi ; et je t'enserre
Dans l'acte de connaître et de nommer.

Art Poétique

Visage séparé de ses branches premières
Beauté toute d'alarme par ciel bas,

En quel âtre dresser le feu de ton visage
O Ménade saisie jetée la tête en bas ?

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*

This opened stone is it you, this wasted house,
How can one die?

I brought light, I searched,
Blood ruled everywhere.
And I cried out and I wept with my entire body.

True Body

The mouth shut, the face washed,
The body purified, that shining fate
Buried in the earth of words—
And the most basic marriage is accomplished.

Silenced that voice which cried before my face
That we were wild and separated,
Walled up those eyes: and I hold Douve dead
In the self's harshness locked with me again.

Though a fierce cold may rise from your being,
And though the frost of our closeness may burn,
Douve, I am speaking in you; and I seize you
In the act of knowing and naming.

Art of Poetry

Face cut off from its first branches
Beauty made up of alarms under a low sky,

In what hearth shall I build the fire of your face
O rapt Maenad overthrown?

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

The Poetry of Edwin Muir

THE RECOGNITION WHICH ANY POET SEEKS from any reader is first and foremost a detailed attention to his poems; and a comprehension and appreciation of them, not in order to clarify a literary landscape or solve a critical problem, but for their own sake. Because of this, the most direct way in which one can offer recognition to Muir's achievement as a poet is to concentrate closely upon his individual poems. Yet in the present state of literary and critical opinion, one cannot, in Muir's case, make this one's first move. There is a general problem about the literary and critical horizon which must be dealt with as a preliminary. In turning to it, I should be sorry even to seem to use Muir's work for the mere purpose of clarifying it: I hope to clarify it in order that his work may transpire more lucidly. There is the end, the generalities are the means.

There is at present, as there has been for generations, something of a current of discussion as to what poetry should be, and how far the poetry of the past, or new verse as it appears, lives up to what it should be. In cultivated conversation, in reviews and articles in literary or academic or critical journals, on the radio, or in public lectures—in all these, the poetry-reading public encounters a veritable bombardment of ideas about what poetry should be and what it should not be, a bombardment of categories, by the presence or absence of which poetry may be commented on, discussed, and assessed. Tentacular roots, richness and solidity of imagery, verbal inter-animation, chastity of diction, tone and tonelessness, concreteness and concrete meaning, syntax, a vernacular quality of language in diction and in rhythm—that probably does not exhaust the current tools of poetic criticism. These are the ideas that are there, ready to be reached for, whenever someone who is well up in current controversy wants to discuss a poem. They are our stock in trade.

There is no need to sweep these critical tools aside, or to argue that they cannot be applied to Muir's poetry; that it does not illustrate such ideas nor have such qualities. Certainly, there

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are other recent poets in whose verse such qualities as so-called inter-animation of words, or metaphorical life, or colloquial strength, are more conspicuous than they are in his. This is partly because the critic's admiration for some of these qualities is itself a historical phenomenon: to take an example, our admiration for complex verbal and metaphorical texture is not the result of a revelation from the Medes and the Persians, but of the influence of ideas about poetic texture which have largely come to us from a certain school of practising poets, to wit the French *Symbolistes* and in particular Mallarmé. Muir's work points back in other directions which will be discussed below. But there is perhaps a more important reason why the favourite poetic qualities of today show less conspicuously in Muir's work than in that of some other recent poets. It is that in the end all these qualities are not the decisive signs of poetic achievement, but the subordinate and derivative ones. They are means to the major poet's ends, not the ends themselves. Certainly, they have their interest; but it is best expressed by saying that these favoured qualities, these qualities that a poem is likely to have today if its writer is equipped and *avant-garde,* are of the kind which by themselves will enable a poem to interest for not just a day, but a year and a day. No longer. By themselves, they have no significance save to contribute another little swirl and eddy to the lively flux, the surface animation, of contemporary literary to-ing and fro-ing. On their own, they have their place somewhere in what one might almost call the journalism about current literature which is an increasing menace to the truly creative writer. Minor poets, intrigued with them, will concentrate on them, and make them conspicuous in their work. The more important writer will be more concerned with the more important things which lie behind. This was Muir's case; in his work what ought to appear only as means to something greater than itself, strictly does so.

Thus to look in Muir's poetry only for metaphorical complexity or for concreteness or for vernacular strength, will not be to come back empty-handed; but to miss the end, for the sake of the means to it, miss the big things for the sake of the small ones. As we read his poetry—this is a sign of its stature—we are likely to find ourselves being driven out of our conventionalities, into a first-hand contact with certain major realities of the poetic art.

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What is rich metaphor *for?* What is concreteness *for?* What is complexity *for?* What is vernacular strength *for?* Only while the answers to these questions are alive in our minds, shall we see what is remarkable not on the mere periphery, but at the centre, of his poems.

An outstanding poem is far from simply an interesting pattern of language. Every outstanding poem is a self-contained and completed *deed* of the imagination—and at one and the same time a record of that deed—which has penetrated into the realities, and the humanly important realities, of human life; and normally, the formal qualities, the "beauty" of the poem, are essentially a part of this, and are nothing but the issuing into words of the fullness and directness and at the same time economy—nothing superfluous, nothing digressive—with which that deed of the imagination has been performed. I say deed of the *imagination,* because the social scientist penetrates, and sometimes at least penetrates deeply, into humanly important realities. But the writer and the poet is concerned not only with the plain facts of what happens, of life; he is concerned also with the forces it holds in reserve, with its potentialities, its hidden strength for all that is remarkable, all that is good, all that is evil. This is why the poet—the poet particularly—may go in his work so far beyond anything that one could call a description of life in the realist's sense, that one begins almost to think that the interest of his poem can lie wholly in the intrinsic strangeness and newness of the imaginary world it describes; that its thrilling fantasy carries no reference back to our ordinary world at all. That is an error. Light cast from a great distance may carry its own decisive revelation. And when we see that this is so, and how it is so, in the poems which strike us as most "imaginative" and least "realistic," I believe that we are then equipped to recognize not only what Muir has achieved, but also the distinctive kind of that achievement, and the distinctive place and affiliations which it has in recent European art, a matter about which more must be said later on.

With these fundamental issues in mind we can turn, for example, to a late poem of Muir's like "Milton," and at once recognize its primary merits, as opposed to its derivative and secondary ones.

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Milton, his face set fair for Paradise,
And knowing that he and Paradise were lost
In separate desolation, bravely crossed
Into his second night and paid his price.
There towards the end he to the dark tower came
Set square in the gate, a mass of blackened stone
Crowned with vermilion fiends like streamers blown
From a great funnel filled with roaring flame.

Shut in his darkness, these he could not see,
But heard the steely clamour known too well
On Saturday nights in every street in Hell.
Where, past the devilish din, could Paradise be?
A footstep more, and his unblinded eyes
Saw far and near the fields of Paradise.

I can see someone trying to praise this poem on account, perhaps, of the muscular quality of "blackened stone"—which, to be sure, conveys a quite different meaning from what "black stone" would convey; and the common-language quality of "on Saturday nights" or "devilish din" (indeed, his cup is full, he can claim ambiguity and wit here as well); and also the concreteness of "Fiends like streamers"; and a few more bits and pieces taken from here and there in the poem. But this response would be a pathetic one. It would be on a level with that of the man who cannot read classical Egyptian hieroglyph and yet prides himself on having given an adequate account of a passage of hieroglyph, when he has praised the sharp edges of the inscription (which he doesn't even *know* is an inscription) and the realism of the fish and the five different birds. An alternative response to the poem, less frivolously out of proportion but still inadequate, would be to praise it purely as creating a "poetic world," the "landscape of Muir's imagination," as if this were something we entered and enjoyed purely for its own newness or strangeness, and not, also, for its reference back to the world of our own realities. For the landscape of a poet's imagination (Muir's or indeed Dante's) is a semi-transparent one: through it, we glimpse our own. And this is the great fact, of which the little fact, the concrete common-language quality of some phrases in this poem, "Milton," is the servant. If we are to

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imagine the noise in Muir's Hell as a "steely clamour known too well on Saturday nights in every street," we know where we are. To wander in this imaginary landscape, to experience its strangeness and terror, is to re-enter our own real landscape by an unexpected and revelatory gate. If Hell is like that, we are forced to say with Mephistopheles in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus:* "why this is Hell, nor am I out of it." *There,* the poet's imaginary and created world, has illuminated *here,* our real one.

Similarly with the most striking part of the poem, the brilliant image of the gate of blackened stone

> Crowned with vermilion fiends like streamers blown
> From a great funnel filled with roaring flame.

This is no mere science fiction vividness. Take away that they are fiends, that it is Hell of which this is the gate, and the bold colours are still there, but the inner strength, the deeper rightness and relevance—by a paradox, the *humanity* of the image—has gone. The great gate that leads in like a funnel but not out, the great destructive powers, bold and exultant, all-too-human and yet inhuman, which surround it, make no merely entertaining and merely horrific fairy-tale picture. They have their reference back to certain great lines of force, if you like, which run through reality; to the standing potentialities of human life. Nor is that the whole of the reference back of the poem; other major lines of force enter into it, because it is a reminder of how there is also in men a steadfastness and intrepidity and indeed pride which can break through those evil powers; and find, or make, a settled good beyond them. Nor is it a mere parable or allegory of these matters, to be interpreted point by point: what makes it a remarkable poem, what gives it its formal beauty, is the artistry—selection and economy and completeness—which has fined down and intensified a narrative into a single unshakeable unity, with the memorableness, the burning insistence, of an icon.

Muir was slow, I believe, to reach this level of achievement. The best illustration of that fact is perhaps the contrast between "The Return," from his 1943 volume, and "Telemachos Remembers," from that of 1956. Both of these centre upon the same topic: Penelope waiting for Ulysses during the years of his absence, and how she spent the time at her loom, keeping the suitors at bay by

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weaving herself a bridal gown during the daytime and unstitching it in secret at night. The later poem is much richer and more detailed than the first, but that is no mere trick of concreteness. It is because by the time he came to write it, Muir saw more deeply into how men and women live; what shapes their life, what quality life can have. Muir could now imagine the whole mythical incident better. Everything in the second poem reads truer and goes deeper. The first Penelope's vague guiding idea of "order and right and hope and peace," becomes the second's more exact and relevant "pride and fidelity and love." The particularized reality of the scene matters to us because it truly embodies just these more general qualities of mind, and therefore contributes to a superbly integrated work of art. The second poem also spreads its vision much more widely than the first, for it sees how the plight of Penelope is only another version of that of Ulysses: her loom is his treadmill. This is why, in the second poem, it was worth Muir's while to render the loom and its web of warriors in terms of which a ready-made criticism could so easily praise the otherwise gratuitous concreteness. Finally, the beautiful orderliness and completeness of the second poem, as against the comparative repetitiveness and jerkiness in the first, are no abstract formal excellence; they are the embodiment of the writer's complete and ordered vision of what he has imagined, the mirror in words of the quality of his vision, his imagination of what life can be like, the dignity in tribulation which it can achieve.

Here is the crucial passage from "The Return:"

> Sole at the house's heart Penelope
> Sat at her chosen task, endless undoing
> Of endless doing, endless weaving, unweaving,
> In the clean chamber. Still her loom ran empty
> Day after day. She thought: 'Here I do nothing
> Or less than nothing, making an emptiness
> Amid disorder, weaving, unweaving the lie
> The day demands. Ulysses, this is duty,
> To do and undo, to keep a vacant gate
> Where order and right and hope and peace can enter.
> Oh will you ever return? Or are you dead,
> And this wrought emptiness my ultimate emptiness?'

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She wove and unwove and wove and did not know
That even then Ulysses on the long
And winding road of the world was on his way.

And here, a little more condensed and oblique in approach, but in the end immensely superior, is "Telemachos Remembers":

Twenty years, every day,
The figures in the web she wove
Came and stood and went away.
Her fingers in their pitiless play
Beat downward as the shuttle drove.

Slowly, slowly did they come,
With horse and chariot, spear and bow,
Half-finished heroes sad and mum,
Came slowly to the shuttle's hum.
Time itself was not so slow.

And what at last was there to see?
A horse's head, a trunkless man,
Mere odds and ends about to be,
And the thin line of augury
Where through the web the shuttle ran.

How could she bear the mounting load,
Dare once again her ghosts to rouse?
Far away Odysseus trod
The treadmill of the turning road
That did not bring him to his house.

The weary loom, the weary loom,
The task grown sick from morn to night,
From year to year. The treadle's boom
Made a low thunder in the room.
The woven phantoms mazed her sight.

If she had pushed it to the end,
Followed the shuttle's cunning song
So far she had no thought to rend
In time the web from end to end,
She would have worked a matchless wrong.

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Instead, that jumble of heads and spears,
Forlorn scraps of her treasure trove.
I wet them with my childish tears
Not knowing she wove into her fears
Pride and fidelity and love.

The present line of thought—that the foundation of Muir's achievement as a poet is not a voguish manipulation of language, but the embodiment in verse of a deep and true apprehension of life—may be taken a step further by considering another poem written about 1950, "Orpheus' Dream." To turn to it serves as a reminder that Muir is, with Graves perhaps, the outstanding British love poet since Yeats; though it is the love not of passion, but of deep mutual intimacy and affection. "Orpheus' Dream", like "Telemachos Remembers", takes its start in a Greek myth; but to see the poem as a "recreation of myth" is almost not to see it at all. Again, there is much in the setting and the imagery of this poem which is reminiscent of neo-Platonic ideas about the existence of the soul before birth, or the heavenly world and the world of sense; and of the traditional imagery in which these ideas have many times been embodied. But nothing could be more to squander this fine poem, than to see it merely as expressing doctrines to which few of us will give credence. The poem speaks not *of* these, but *through* them, of the potentialities of our own experience—of what fulfilment in lasting love is like, of how it can come, of what it can yield. Nor of course is the poem a statement of these things; everything about it—and here is its integrity, its unity, its beauty—embodies them and helps to cast the reader's mind into a condition where these things, and the emotions which attend them, are felt with the force of an intuition. That is true of the two scenes or images, charged with calm and quiet and gentleness, with which the poem opens and closes: Eurydice appearing in the skiff of Orpheus, the ghost of Eurydice alone on her throne in the underworld. It is true of the shift, unobtrusive yet almost startling once noticed, from the third person to the second, and back again, in the course of the poem. It is true also of the very rhythms of the poem, so unassertive and yet so full of calm buoyant life; and of the beautiful opening out and closing in, as it were, of what it has to say; and of the almost naive lucidity

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of the diction. Wherever the reader turns, he finds some new detail contributing to the effect of the whole; and the work of the whole is to record, with a serene finality, something which matters in life itself, and to record it in the mirror, a diminishing and yet a magnifying glass, of a poem:

> And she was there. The little boat,
> Coasting the perilous isles of sleep,
> Zones of oblivion and despair,
> Stopped, for Eurydice was there.
> The foundering skiff could scarcely keep
> All that felicity afloat.
>
> As if we had left earth's frontier wood
> Long since and from this sea had won
> The lost original of the soul,
> The moment gave us pure and whole
> Each back to each, and swept us on
> Past every choice to boundless good.
>
> Forgiveness, truth, atonement, all
> Our love at once—till we could dare
> At last to turn our heads and see
> The poor ghost of Eurydice,
> Still sitting in her silver chair
> Alone in Hades' empty hall.

If we bring to this poem nothing but the current coin of critical analysis, we can even so find something there. We can single out, for example, the rhythmic control of emphasis:

> The little boat,
> Coasting the perilous isles of sleep,
> Zones of oblivion and despair,
> Stopped, . . .

and:

> Forgiveness, truth, atonement, all
> Our love at once, till we could dare
> At last to turn our heads . . .

Certainly, in passages like these, Muir shows himself for a deft

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and intelligent craftsman in verse. But comparatively speaking, how trivial, how futile praise in these terms would be, unless as the merest preliminary; unless we see craftsmanship as serving something greater than craftsmanship, serving in fact the new modes of vision of the poet which have led him to the new modes of being which he creates in his verse.

On the other hand, I can see a more futile criticism still, one which complained of a general lack of concreteness, lack of realization, in such phrases as "the moment gave us pure and whole/ Back each to each"; and "boundless good"; and "all our love at once." "This is too vague!" I can hear the critic say. "What do these phrases mean? Why is the poem not specific, why does it not *say?*"—ignoring the fact, first, that largely it does say, in its whole largeness and gentleness, its simplicity and absence of local complication: qualities which are in part created by just the open, simple diction of which my imaginary critic complains. Ignoring also, one should add, the fact that we do not come to the reading of poetry with all the nakedness and ignorance of a babe unborn. We come to it with our experience of life and our care for it, our own emotions and insight. The poet, saying just so much, from us elicits more. He can enlarge the horizons of our imagination because it already *has* horizons, towards which his poem can turn our mind's eye. This is a large subject, and one cannot pursue it; one can only add that the opposite view, that which sees poetic merit only in poetry which pushes rich novelty of detail and what I believe is known as "specificity" to a maximum point, is simply a recent and, to judge by analogy, transient fashion which falls into a plain story of historical development: in particular of the historical accident whereby Mallarmé and Hopkins could be discovered at about the same time.

I suspect that there may be something notably of our own age in the particular way in which it interested Muir to write of love between men and women: not as what is called "romantic" love, nor as what we find celebrated in much of Donne's verse, but as the relaxed yet profound affection which supervenes upon sustained intimacy. However this may be, I leave it aside because there are other respects in which Muir was very conspicuously, as poet, a register of his own time and of some of its major forces. It is a strange thing—unless we remember Muir's years in Ger-

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many after the first war, or in Prague until after its fall, following the second—to notice how this quiet and elderly poet, living a comparatively retired life, was deeply concerned with the modern world (insofar as it is a world of war, totalitarianism, terrorism and the displaced person) at a time when his younger contemporaries, almost without exception, have either left these topics to others, or exploited them in a style which will bear no inspection. Indeed, although the 1930s were to some extent Muir's prentice years as a poet, he ranks high among the (in a broad sense) "political" poets of that decade; and if we enquire why it has been that he deepened and strengthened his awareness of political realities right up to the end of his life, whereas the other political poets of that time have on the whole, as poets, done the opposite, the reason is not far to seek. It is that, to the reader of today, much of the so-called political poetry of the 1930's was really a compromise between treating major political realities on the one hand, and being inclined to satisfy certain minor and transient poetic fashions on the other. Thus (though my purpose is not to disparage Auden's work as a whole) consider the first verse of *Danse Macabre:*

> It's farewell to the drawing-room's civilized cry,
> The professor's sensible whereto and why,
> The frock-coated diplomat's social aplomb,
> Now matters are settled with gas and with bomb.

or alternatively, this description, from *The Age of Anxiety,* of an air-raid on a town.

> we laid our eggs
> Neatly in their nest, a nice deposit
> Which instantly hatched; houses flamed in
> Shuddering sheets as we shed our big
> Tears on their town . . .

These passages have their own qualities. As one reads them, ideas about how poetry ought to use plain language, ought to be astringent and witty, ought to draw readily on the tone of irony, ought to take subjects and metaphors from ordinary life, all flood into one's mind. And ought to cause it nothing but pain. For it is exactly this, which still comes in for praise in a stock way, that

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turns those passages into frivolous period pieces, devoid of serious contact with the realities they purport to describe. In Muir's verse this in the long run disabling voguishness never appears. That is why he does not lend himself to chaffering in the current coin of critical parlance, and why to study his work, is to be driven all the time to challenge that current parlance. In his verse, we hear the accents of one who is in another world from that of the poetically or the critically smart thing; we hear, at last, the voice of a poet speaking with complete directness and sincerity, with a total absence of literary flyness and manoeuvring, because he is wholly engrossed in what he writes of, and in making it into a poem wholly in his own way. It is this stellar remoteness from the vogue, and this only, which can make a poem endure; everything conflicting with it, however subtle and sophisticated, will in the long run make verse at the best trivial, and at the worst—or perhaps this *is* the best—forgotten.

Most of Muir's more important political poems, or poems showing his concern with what one might call the basic rhythms of modernity—"The Labyrinth", say, "The Good Town", "The Combat", "Adam's Dream", or a still uncollected poem like "The Last War"—are comparatively long, and of a kind which makes short extracts unprofitable. A more convenient example, therefore, is the poem "Troy," published as early as 1937. Though a pre-war poem, though one set (as so often with Muir) in the world of classical myth, though there are verbal echoes of Eliot, yet for all that, the poem strikes today's reader as a vision of post-war Europe, of the chaos of the late 1940s. Moreover (whatever may be said of verbal echoes) the attitude of the poem, and the awareness which lies behind it, are quite different from Eliot, and notably Muir's own. And equally distinctive of Muir is what might be termed the *mode* in which it makes its principal statements.

> He all that time among the sewers of Troy
> Scouring for scraps. A man so venerable
> He might have been Priam's self, but Priam was dead,
> Troy taken. His arms grew meagre as a boy's,
> And all that flourished in that hollow famine
> Was his long, white, round beard. Oh, sturdily
> He swung his staff and sent the bold rats skipping

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Across the scurfy hills and worm-wet valleys,
Crying: 'Achilles, Ajax, turn and fight!
Stop cowards!' Till his cries, dazed and confounded,
Flew back at him with: 'Coward, turn and fight!'
And the wild Greeks yelled round him.
Yet he withstood them, a brave, mad old man,
And fought the rats for Troy. The light was rat-grey,
The hills and dells, the common drain, his Simois,
Rat-grey. Mysterious shadows fell
Affrighting him whenever a cloud offended
The sun up in the other world. The rat-hordes,
Moving, were grey dust shifting in grey dust.
Proud history has such sackends. He was taken
At last by some chance robber seeking treasure
Under Troy's riven roots. Dragged to the surface.
And there he saw Troy like a burial ground
With tumbled walls for tombs, the smooth sward wrinkled
As time's last wave had long since passed that way,
The sky, the sea, Mount Ida and the islands,
No sail from edge to edge, the Greeks clean gone.
They stretched him on a rock and wrenched his limbs,
Asking: 'Where is the treasure?' till he died.

One thing is especially remarkable about this poem: its essential structure is to be a progress through a series of sharply created images; yet these are images which immediately establish themselves as having nothing to do with *Imagism*—with the pleasing pictures, faithfully observed, entirely for the sake of what they looked like, of Hilda Dolittle, T. E. Hulme or others. Muir's images—first the "brave, mad old man" fighting the rats, then the grey, rat-like landscape, then ruined Troy "like a burial ground," and finally the victim stretched out on the rock, are not offered us at all as models of close sensuous observation or intricate concrete realization in a subtly inter-playing verbal texture. Rather, it seems—and in Muir's later and sparer poems it seems much more —as if the poet has broken through all this, as if through a surface: and has confronted us, by what is a kind of skeletal presentation, with the essential quality of a deeply disturbing reality. Not, if you like, the suave intricacies of daytime observation, but the

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poignant or frightening diagrams of dream or nightmare: *icons*—this word seemed the obvious one to use earlier on—*icons* which rivet the attention and at their most powerful seem to stamp themselves indelibly upon the mind. In the poems already quoted, from "Milton" onwards, this is the most recurrent feature.

At this point I turn to Muir's place in the artistic achievement of the twentieth century. He was not only the contemporary of Beckett—"Troy" must have reminded the reader of Beckett's work—but also the translator of Kafka and student of Rilke. This means that he has his place in a movement in the arts of Europe as a whole, which comes a whole generation later than the French poets who, it seems, still dominate critical thought in England. This in part is why his work does not fit in; why some critically-minded readers hardly know what to make of him. Perhaps the point will come clearly out if recent poetry is considered in a context of painting. Mallarmé, in his *Crise de Vers* of 1894, said that in true poetry the poet should "cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalités mobilisés." The effect of this would be that words could kindle "reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle trainée de feu sur des pierreries." Where could we find the nearest analogue in painting to this beautiful surface intricacy? I suggest, the earlier work of the French Impressionists: Monet, Renoir, Pissarro: their inter-play of objects through colour, shadow and reflection, to create a dazzling, glittering, infinitely subtle orchestration of light. But Muir's work reminds one, precisely, of the painters who rejected Impressionism; less the French ones of the end of the nineteenth century (though they certainly belong to the story too) than the German ones of the early twentieth century, with their consciousness of the element of horror, chaos, and nightmare in life, and their seeking to represent, even with a certain radical indifference to surface appearance, the stark and abiding inner essence of reality. And the statements of these painters themselves, about what they tried to do, chime decisively with what is to be seen in Muir's poetry. Paul Klee took as his slogan, "from the model to the *archetype*"; Max Beckmann, a year after Muir published "Troy," said "What I try to show in my work is the idea which lies behind so-called reality. I strive to find the bridge that leads from the visible to the invisible, like the famous cabalist . . . My figures come and go as luck or misfortune bids

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them. I try to transfix them stripped of their accidental superficial characteristics." And in 1915 Franz Marc, writing his "Aphorisms from the Front"—the German Western Front—said this: "Everything has its shell and kernel, semblance and being, . . . the fact that we only grope at the shell . . . that we are so blinded by the mask of things that we cannot find the truth—how does that refute the inner definiteness of things?." These three Expressionist painters are all saying what could be taken as a statement of Muir's deepest concern; the plain fact is that Muir (like Beckett) is a reflection in literature not of Impressionism but of Expressionism. Here is the relevance of Kafka. The labyrinthine threadings to and fro in Kafka's *Castle* and *Trial* are in one sense, to be sure, complex enough. But they are not Mallarméan complexities at all: or better, a comparison with Mallarmé's contemporary Huysmanns' novel *A Rebours* brings out the point. Kafka is not, as Huysmann was, asking his reader to sense subtle gradations, modifications, nuances, of his hero's experiences page by page. Rather, he presents in essence the same experience over and over, varying only on the surface, until we are left with a characteristically Expressionist achievement: an inescapable icon of the Castle or of the Court on the one hand, and one of the mere human individual as seeker on the other. And what is memorable about both books is that these polar extremities are impressed indelibly upon the reader's mind as the two basic realities which underlie every complexity of surface appearance. In Kafka's short stories, as might be expected, this icon quality is even clearer: the man with the hideous wound in "The Country Doctor," for example; the lighted door and door keeper of "Before the Law"; and everything, indeed, in that remarkable microcosm of Kafka's longer works, "The Burrow."

This whole trend is an important movement in the arts of Europe during the present century (the painter Rouault is also prominent in it); and a valid reflection of the element of horror and chaos in the contemporary world or the recent past. If it were more widely understood in England and America, we should also understand, for example, some of Eliot's verse better than we do; for he is not simply a Symbolist poet, but very much a Post-Symbolist. That these movements are comparatively unfamiliar here, save I assume among specialists in the visual arts, is

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perhaps a measure of what we have been spared in real life; and Edwin Muir—along with Willa Muir, who played a vital part in the enterprise of translating Kafka—will one day have a place in our cultural history simply as having been among the first to introduce them, in literature, to the English-speaking world.

Yet—the most important point of all—in Muir's own verse, so far as we find those trends at work, we find them having undergone a decisive transmutation. To the layman's eye at least, German Expressionist painting of the early years of this century is impressive for its courageous, unflinching confrontation of what is harsh and brutal in life, and for the power with which it concentrates this vision into the picture. But in its rigid insistence on this, it is with few exceptions a school of hardness and dread. A windowless room in which the only object was a painting by Max Beckmann would be long remembered; but not long endured. Turning to Kafka, we find that he can indeed write, in his Aphorisms, "we were fashioned to live in Paradise"; but the idea is one which enters his work very much tangentially. Nightmare and bewilderment and savage humour dominate it; the deliverance from these is something which the author could no more than reach for, and in the main we feel this reaching forward only as the novels peter out to their unfinished ends.

To turn back to Muir's poems is to encounter a diametrical opposite. "Milton" did not show Hell merely, but a triumph over it; "Telemachos Remembers," not deprivation merely, but deprivation conquered by simple integrity; the old man in "Troy" was no symbol of the chaos and brutality within which he had to live and die, but rather, an embodiment of the human powers which these cannot touch. The great central fact about Muir's work is that although in his vision of life the powers of evil were great, ultimately the powers of good and goodness were greater; and they were greater because they were also humbler, more primaeval, nearer to life in its archaic simplicity, which Muir was able to see not far below life's surface distractions. This, in the end, is the inner vision of joy which the iconic quality of his verse predominantly serves; and it is this sense of the simple but spacious powers of goodness held by life in reserve, that is ultimately what demands, and what justifies, Muir's simple but often monumental imagery; and his grave and lucid rhythms; and the honesty and

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spareness of his diction. This positive quality, this sense of a trust finally reposed in man and what is in man, does not make Muir a greater artist than the others with whom I have associated him; and in fact, Kafka is clearly a greater writer than he. But it makes him significantly different, and to many readers will make his work an endearing source of strength. "Far inland shines the radiant hill," Muir wrote in "Outside Eden,"one of his last poems. We do not understand his work unless we see how central to its achievement is that radiance, and how it works down into the movement of the verse word by word. To emphasize how I am not now speaking merely of Muir's "philosophy", but of something which is to be felt through the whole tissue of many of his poems, I take "The Annunciation," of about 1950. Again, we have a myth: this time not Greek but Christian. The iconic quality is unmistakable; but it is not in any mere comment, it is in the innermost feel of the poem, evoked as this is by the rhythms and the language, that the centre of Muir's vision of life must be traced:

The angel and the girl are met.
Earth was the only meeting place.
For the embodied never yet
Travelled beyond the shore of space.
The eternal spirits in freedom go.
See, they have come together, see,
While the destroying minutes flow,
Each reflects the other's face
Till heaven in hers and earth in his
Shine steady there. He's come to her
From far beyond the farthest star,
Feathered through time. Immediacy
Of strangest strangeness is the bliss
That from their limbs all movement takes.
Yet the increasing rapture brings
So great a wonder that it makes
Each feather tremble on his wings.

Outside the window footsteps fall
Into the ordinary day
And with the sun along the wall
Pursue their unreturning way

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That was ordained in eternity.
Sound's perpetual roundabout
Rolls its numbered octaves out
And hoarsely grinds its battered tune.

But through the endless afternoon
These neither speak nor movement make,
But stare into their deepening trance
As if their gaze would never break.

There is no more need to be a Christian in order to admire that, than there was to be a Greek to admire "Telemachos Remembers." What is required is only to be a man, to be able to recognize what is an illumination of a part of life, or of one great direction of life's potentiality. Muir's work as a whole reminds us that it is something like this, and no astuteness with words for anything *but* this, which is the primary concern of the poet and therefore of the critic. Our first dept of gratitude to Muir should be for what he has done; for the body of achievement in poetry which he has left for our admiration and delight, even our sustainment. But it is proper to add to that, a recognition of how his work reminds us, with his own characteristic unassumingness and limpidity, of these basic truths about poetry; and does so in a period when, for many, the reminder is a timely one.

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JOSEPH BENNETT

Florida: A Seasonal View

Then came Felix of Hypoluxo, Floridian Faust,
And with him the Princess, extending a tired and
draping lung
Over the banister.
I felt a certain pallor
Extend itself over our souls
And a steadied witchcraft
Disappearing down her throat.
Felix himself, no stranger to pyrotechnic,
Set fuses, which, damply, exploded.
Meanwhile the race went on.
I felt an interim had been reached
When his teeth went up in sprockets
Like white flame
And his grinning mouth
Left only the gums, bare, mawking
At our inefficiencies.
A high standard of living surrounded the President
Who conferred decorations, inestimable, upon Felix.
He had expanded consumption, destroyed inflation
His grin dominated the White House
Where Martha Washington in her ice cream factory
Whipped up the batter, to the sickened Fannie Farmer.
They changed batteries.

O he of Hypoluxo, seen on television,
His calm, reassuring words
Stunned the nation to higher levels
And many died, retching, gorged on the good things of this
earth.
Down Worth Avenue, past Phipps Plaza,
The massed Cadillacs charged,
Red blood flowing from their louvers.
Automatic energy boards and massed panels

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Reveling in hot anger:
Furibond, enmassed, charging
They deserted the pavement
For the blades of grass; they wallowed on the golf course,
Churning the sand traps, longing for their President.

He of Hypoluxo, with his soft voice,
Urged from their radios,
Fanning them on
Above bloody wheels.

Russian bombers, observing the melee,
Sent cables to Moscow:
The Cadillacs have revolted; the war is on.
And that night, on a thousand golf courses,
The corpses of dead cars
Lifted up their radios
In a silent deaf offering
To Him of a Thousand Puttees,
With his Clubs and his Smile
A thousand excuses
Wallowing with Martha Washington
In the egg-pure mud
While above the President looked down,
And the moon dripped spearmint into the lake.

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X. J. KENNEDY

The Sirens

stayed in one place and did no work
but warble ditties shrill and loose,
strike poses, primp, bedeck their rock
with primrose boxes. Odysseus

salt-lipped, long bandied before winds,
heard in his loins a bass chord stir,
said to his men, 'Men, stop your ears.
I need not, being an officer.'

Under the deaf indifferent tread
of wood on water, round each oar
broke like the grapes of Ilium
ripening clusters of blue air

and when those soft sounds stole there grew
the notion as he champed his bit
that love was all there was, and death
had something to be said for it.

Roared as the music sweetened, railed
against his oarsmen's bent wet slopes,
imprisoned in propriety
and pagan ethic. Also ropes.

Sails strummed. The keel drove tapestries
of distance on the silk sea's loom,
leaving those simple girls beyond
woven undone rewoven foam

to wonder: Had they lost their touch?
Unbroken yet, a woof of sea
impelled him to his dying dog,
pantoufles, and Penelope.

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First Confession

Blood thudded in my ears—I scuffed,
steps stubborn, to the telltale booth
beyond whose curtained portal coughed
the robed repositor of truth.

The slat shot back. The universe
bent down his cratered dome to hear
enumerated my each curse,
the sip snitched from my old man's beer,

my sloth pride envy lechery,
the dime held back from Peter's Pence
with which I'd bribed my girl to pee
that I might spy her instruments—

his scale-pans hovering when I'd done
settled their balance slow as silt
while in the restless dark I burned
bright as a brimstone in my guilt

until as one feeds birds he doled
seven Our Fathers and a Hail
which I to double-scrub my soul
intoned twice at the altar rail

where Sunday in seraphic light
I knelt, as full of grace as most,
and stuck my tongue out at the priest:
a fresh roost for the Holy Ghost.

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ALEXANDER CRAIG

Philosopher Among New Ruins

A Variation on the Theme of "The Last Man"

He recalled in the evil light
The foursquare and fated city
Afraid, ships at the jetty
On fire and the planes, in flight,
Still menaced in mauve air.
Shattered, the curved steel shell
Lay hugely where it fell
In the great charred crater—there
On the outskirts of town
(The moon, ghosting sick and green,
A relic above that scene):
The missile grail, flung down,
Far brighter than neons, rose
In vapor, creating these
Final epiphanies—
A vision no one chose.

He thought: "A dream began it.
In floodlit brilliance a
Future like a dancer
Or, say, a dazzling planet
Poised on today's rim,
Spun and tumbled, fell
Now to this version of hell . . ."
But much still puzzled him:
"To make outrageous fable
Tower glittering and actual,
Real to the sight and tactual—
In all this we were able
But could no longer see
What we were blinded by.
Now glazed is man's dark eye
That held eternity.

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"How low above that rim,
The long horizon-line,
Uncertainly the sun
Comes fingering the dim
Margin of earth and stone
And streaking each thin tree,
Like weak remembrance . . . See
At last the dawn begin
In a spectral sky still filled
With presences and power—
Lost voices in despair
Above the dwindled world!
Gray huddled houses stare
Sightless, their windows blind
And smashed: I cannot find
A soul with me to share
This pitying pale light
That shows yet veils their shame.
The sun will rise, the same
As always, to its height
Of noon—meridian heat
For me alone below,
Sole lord of all things now,
King of my own conceit."

Now (crown of ironies
And raining stars) he must
Walk cautiously in this dust,
This air of centuries
Breathe carefully; must watch
The dog-star's frenzied dive
In memory, stay alive
And prove himself their match.

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WILLIAM STAFFORD

In Fear and Valor

My mother was afraid
and in my life her fear has hid:
when Perseus holds the Gorgon's head,
she cringes, naked.

Clothed in my body, wild,
even as I grew strong,
my mother, weeping, suffered
the whole world's wrong.

Vanquished and trembling before she died,
she claimed a place in my every limb:
my mother, lost in my stride, fears Death,
as I hunt Him.

The Job

It starts before light—
all that story of the stars
night winking meaning,
dawn still frozen, and in dark spells
in our little town, at zero in winter,
from every house plumed furnaces announcing themselves,
from our house a great gray promise
promising upward and out from town: dawn.

We feel confident.
(Into some local brain we think the story will come
like swallows into a house, anyone's head, any
thought's home.)

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The church rises from its trees and holds
its true darkness tall, nearly visible,
then really tall till the earth rings; the bells
only swing in the cold silently opening
their mouths; and we walk into the call of the college.

Now the hall takes us toward quiet,
past the stairwell where Foucault's pendulum
remembers how the earth used to spin;
we turn again, enter the classroom,
look at the deep faces looking at us,
deep in our school, waiting under the school roof;
we open the book with care and hold our breath:
begin—translating the vast versions of the wind.

Looking for Someone

1

Many a time driving over the Coast Range,
down the cool side—hemlock, spruce, then shore pine—
I've known something I should have said one time:
If we don't meet, then this all has to change.

2

We were judged; our shadows knew our height,
and after dark, exact, the air confirmed
all with its move or stillness:
each of us was trapped on an odd-shaped island.

3

Sleet persuades a traveler: I all night
know no under the earth escape
even when the sky goes back remote.
Walking till the stars forget, I look out

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4

And watch the smoke at Astoria and Seaside
cringing along the coast, and barefoot gulls
designing the sand: "Go flat, go flat,"—the waves;
the little boat, the mild riding light. . . .

5

Sand is so democratic, trading places down the wind,
everything distancing away. Finding this
took all this time, and you're not even here.
We've not met, and all this has to change.

DOROTHY ROBERTS

Before Marriage

Intolerably bright the thin
Saw-saw of the cicadas
And the moon, round, flooding in.

My daughter in my mind is flooded white—
No omen for her marriage but the bare
And piercing celebration of the night.

"Whose daughter?" shines the moon,
And the cicadas
Shrill on incessantly, insist, insist
None who are separate in their ways persist.

The heat is honey and the wind is lost,
The rain has never been, the vacant moon
Chimes with cicadas and the world is green.

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A Warm Act

A rose is a warm act: the tenderness
Breaks from the bud with the fragrance yet undiluted
In the great blue flood of the summer air.

Petals, overlapping pattern, open yet press
The concentrated heart: here's the ideal,
The rose, the beautiful, sung everywhere.

Raindrops are perfume, and the promised excess
Still hides, until in heat the heart exposes
Pollen to the fathomless

Golden dispersal. Buzz, hum. No wind comes here
To finish an act all warmth: the petals break
From the green knob and lie upon the grass.

Worlds

I could wish it the world that is showing now,
One of remote beginnings, moon
Heavy and close in a hugging sky,
Green grown massive and dark, and oh
The only voice insects in perpetual
Concordance clanging.

Better this voice before the dawn
Of the light that confuses and quiets it down,
Than anxious things waking one by one
To take their positions under the sun.

Colorless in a languid moon
A dank world set to the insect rule
With rattle and clang—oh better than one
That sees its advantage under the sun.

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ELDER OLSON

The Impersonation

Returning from the diner you had the first inkling
Of the plot against you: a man was in your seat,
Dressed exactly like you; in fact, your double.
It was sheer luck that you managed to hide
Before the others came down the aisle, searching for you
With evident intentions; sheer luck, too,
That you found the wherewithal for a disguise
So that you could safely ride out the rest of the journey,
In full view, by a window, as if simply watching
The short twilight of the winter day,
The dripping towns, the lights of scattered farms.
When at last out of the long tunnel of night
The train ran into the great bright terminus,
You watched "yourself" descend, to be greeted eagerly
By your wife and children; could you have protested?
Perhaps, perhaps; but you saw who was drawing near you,
And fled, as you had to; a week later, you were stumbling
Through thick woods, under a lowering sky,
Disturbing snow-laden brambles, dislodging wreaths of snow,
With them a step behind you; they nearly had you, later,
On that knuckle of rock by the sullen coiling river.
It was touch and go, too, in the sodden flats
With the salt-like snow hissing down in the sear grasses
And strings of wild swans flying over; well, well—
Why go through the whole story? Suffice it to say
You were hunted out of your life for years and years
And meanwhile your life was lived by someone else
And when at last you managed to return
You found yourself within a cemetery
Where mourners watched a coffin being lowered.
There, in the box, you were; yourself at last.
And you think all this unusual? My poor friend!
Millions, millions, millions live and die so.

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DENIS DONOGHUE

Dublin Letter

DUBLIN, THE LARGEST VILLAGE IN IRELAND, has a population of 586,503 (approx.). In one village 586,503 orators make a lot of talk. Even as wet years go, this has been a talkative time.

There was the Congo fracas. This had the disadvantage of being far away, and geography is not very well taught in Irish schools, but anything an Irishman does anywhere is news for Irishmen. We were a bit hazy about the politics of the event, but quite clear that on our part it was a splendid gesture, that we were doing a grand thing, taking our rightful place among the nations of the world. (*Vide* correspondence columns of the Dublin daily newspapers, August 1960, *passim*. Sufficient for the day is the *Dublin Evening Mail* thereof, as Joyce's J. J. O'Molloy nearly said.) True, two or three gentlemen wondered whether we would be so keen on our participation in the U.N. police force if Irish soldiers happened to be killed in the cause, but most of us ruled the question out of order. Irish journalists dashed to Leopoldville to make sure that our boys had everything necessary for bodily and spiritual welfare. It brought out the mother in us.

The Congo; Mr. Boland's success at the U.N. in an iron time; our phalanx of failures at the Olympic Games; Brendan Behan's performance at Vassar; the All-Ireland Football Final, won in a bad year by a team from the "occupied" North; De Valera in Phoenix Park; the poet Patrick Kavanagh in Soho; the state of Yeats's Drumcliffe; why Ronnie Delany didn't win; the rise and fall of Myles na gCopaleen; these and similar topics have engaged the attention of Dublin's dialecticians during the past year. The only rule in this talk-game is that all issues are equally important but important only as entertainment. Kenneth Burke has suggested that political contests in the United States make more sense as entertainment than as politics: in Ireland this would be considered platitudinous and Burke, for once, a naïf. "We traffic in mockery": remember Yeats. The trouble is that there are no public issues in Ireland which generate any real heat; we are all agreed about the basic facts, Partition, the Irish language, neutrality, trade. To the naked eye the political parties seem to differ only as Cheddar differs from Cheshire; and I have never witnessed a fight about *that*. Occasionally a scandal breaks through the gloom of Irish public life; Honor Tracy and Paul Blanshard rush into block capitals, to the amusement of their Irish readers; and the fog closes in again. Even the fall of a government is interesting only as a talking-point: it rarely matters, we have only to talk the event amiably into the grave.

National lethargy makes life difficult for those who produce official

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entertainments, but they are tenacious gentlemen. We have had a year of festivals: opera in Wexford, cinema in Cork, Yeats in Sligo, oysters in Clarenbridge. Yeats was hardly as popular as the oysters, but he was not a flop: ironic Irishmen welcomed pious foreigners to the shrine and postponed the derisive anecdotes until a suitably Celtic occasion. The general attitude to Yeats in Ireland is that he was a charlatan; it is considered appropriate that he should be revered by foreigners, foreigners being what they are, but any Irish critic who takes the man seriously is a fool. "AE was a far better man any day of the week. Listen, did you hear about the girl who accosted Yeats after his blather about divorce, the speechifying in the Senate, you know? It was like this. . . ." The young Irish poets boycotted the Yeats show at Sligo this year; one of them rebuked me for not inviting him and/or his poetic colleagues to perform.

The Dublin International Theatre Festival has had a melodramatic infancy. In 1957 Alan Simpson gave *The Rose Tattoo* and was promptly arrested for having "produced for gain an indecent and profane performance." After thirteen legalistic months he was acquitted. In 1958 the director of the Festival, Brendan Smith, planned to offer Sean O'Casey's new play *The Drums of Father Ned,* Alan McClelland's dramatization of *Ulysses* under the title "Bloomsday," three mime plays by Samuel Beckett, and *All that Fall.* But the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. J. C. McQuaid, refused to allow Mass to be said at the opening of the Spring Celebrations unless the works by Joyce and O'Casey were withdrawn. One word borrowed another, as it invariably does in Ireland's pawn-shops. An estrangement developed between Mr. O'Casey and the Dublin Tóstal Council (*tóicheastal* is Irish for pageant), and the entire Festival was abandoned. In the meantime the organizers of this event have become more cautious, and the most recent venture proceeded without incident. Indeed, the only play which evoked any public interest was *The Scatterin',* by James McKenna, a young Irish "angry" whose training as a sculptor has been facilitated by several scholarships from public funds. Mr. McKenna's theme is the frustration of Dublin's young men in a country endowed with nothing but an incandescent past. The play was considered original, but only by those who had not adverted to *Sweeney Agonistes, The Threepenny Opera, The Hostage, The Entertainer, West Side Story,* or *The Connection.* As a derivative piece the play had its moments; the local jokes were locally funny, and even the author's self-pity was tolerable.

The only foreign participants in the Theatre Festival were the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, in *Hassan,* and the Old Vic in *Macbeth.* Indeed, the Festival was about as international as Enniscorthy in "Buy Irish" Week: we are splendidly parochial in these matters. Walter Mackin's *The Voices of Doolin,* a piece of tinsel about an alcoholic doll-maker, was offered in all seriousness; its sole and, presumably, suffi-

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cient merit is that it is unmistakably "Irish." (I recall a few lines from Marianne Moore and might as well insert them here as prose: "Although your suitor be perfection, one objection is enough; he is not Irish.") Siobhan McKenna, actress and part-time political commentator, gave a remarkably eloquent performance as Pegeen Mike in *The Playboy of the Western World* and almost managed to make Synge's rhythms sound fresh. Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fella'* seemed at home in the Abbey; a one-act melodrama multiplied by three and comfortably assimilated to the Abbey tradition of kitchen farce.

The most respectable part of the Festival was *The Importance of Being Oscar,* a programme devised by Micheal MacLiammoir from the published works of Oscar Wilde and the *obiter dicta* of Micheal MacLiammoir. Mr. MacLiammoir is Oireland's Barrymore but nobody's fool; his style of acting was defined long before he was born, but he understands his forefathers and sees no reason why he should now repudiate them. Dublin, a theatrical town, appreciates this loyalty. And bear in mind that Dublin got its own first star-part in the eighteenth century and has spent the intervening seasons in the same role: on stage, it favours the sob, the shameless sigh, the imperious manner, the actor as Actor. Speaking Wilde, Mr. MacLiammoir was lord of the green carnation: never embarrassed by his own cleverness or by Wilde's, he fondled his words as if he were wondering whether they were the right shade for an October evening and deciding that, after all, they would "answer" . . . with that settled, he produced his little jokes to rival Wilde's (*"Salome* is admired all over the world wherever English is not spoken"), a knowing gesture, a morsel of scholarship, and a "romantic" voice; when he touched his nose, it was only to show that he could at once court and defeat vulgarity. He is, in his way, an adept of largesse. And for the most part his way was convincingly Wilde's on this October evening; when he used words like "emotion," "passion," and "beauty," he rubbed out the inverted commas as imperiously as the author of *The Decay of Lying:* there was no Korzybski nonsense in Dublin that night. True, the evening was incomplete; there was nothing of Wilde the Taoist, or the man who spent many solid hours *thinking.* But what was given was given magnificently. Even when Mr. MacLiammoir sounded like his own Robert Emmett, in the flagrantly dishonest *Ballad of Reading Gaol,* it was somehow right, rhetorically exact, that he should sound like his own Robert Emmett; that was the way to do it.

Dubliners are very fond of Mr. MacLiammoir. Some of them say that he is really a Sassenach called Michael Wilmore, but they forgive him freely because he chose them in preference to London or Hollywood and because he speaks and writes fine Gaelic. I imagine he hardly suffers at all from the notorious "problem of communication," at least in Dublin. The Dublin theatre is still a fairly "popular" institution. I recall an evening at the Olympia Theatre a few years ago when a

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gentleman in the audience was encouraged, in the first interval, to sing *Let Me like a Soldier Fall,* and the audience called for more; the singer, a tenor, "obliged" with *Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes.* Mr. MacLiammoir is part of this tradition, the tradition of unabashed "performance": he is a spectacular rhetorician in a town in which ancient rhetoric is still not quite dead. Dublin may be all talk, but some of it is speech; decadent speech, sometimes, speech for its own sake, what the rhetoricians called "epideictic," but speech still in contact with its formal public role.

Hence the continuing success of many old-world entertainments such as Grand Opera, Gilbert and Sullivan, the gentle musical comedies from the 'twenties, Christmas pantomimes, and Jimmy O'Dea. This is the world of Dublin's Gaiety Theatre, which adorns its staircases with amiable photographs of Lena Ashwell, Martin Harvey, Lewis Waller, Edna May with tea-service, and Mary Anderson with palmleaf drapery over an already formidable gown. The Gate Theatre has a different ambience: its manager, the Earl of Longford, has found an audience for Molière, Wilde, Sheridan, Goldsmith, Shaw, and Pinero, and he has given this audience an idea of Style which, however quaint, is certainly better than nothing and probably more engaging than any other version one would be likely to encounter in Dublin's theatres. One grim and popular alternative is the series of deadbeat frolics which are tried on the dogs at the Olympia Theatre nowadays before being bottled in London as genuine West End dope. The Globe Theatre sometimes does a patient job, as in a recent production of *The House of Bernarda Alba,* but more frequently it affects plays like *The Bad Seed, Picnic,* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof,* produced with internecine accents and an idea of Style drawn largely, one must assume, from the reviews in *Time* magazine. Alan Simpson's Pike Theatre is freighted with an anti-parochial mission and staggering physical limitations, but it manages to give a few "quality" productions and tolerable revues. The famous Abbey . . . well, the Abbey is a special case, and needs a new paragraph.

The common impression of the Abbey is that in recent years it has fallen from the high image created by Yeats in 1904. This is only half-true. Everybody knows that the present Abbey is intellectually null, and that its devotion to semi-literate "comedies" is—under Mr. Ernest Blythe's auspices—incorrigible. The place of intellectual excitement "where the mind goes to be liberated" (W.B.Y.) is more frequently occupied by *Is the Priest at Home?* or *The Country Boy* than by *Purgatory* or *A Full Moon in March.* No one disputes this. But even the old Abbey featured a considerable amount of peasant comedy, and very little of it was Art; the corn was pretty green. Yeats assented to this on the grounds that "a theatre such as we project should give a reasonably complete expression to the imaginative interests of its country": hence George Shiels, hence *The Whiteheaded Boy,* hence *Spreading the News.*

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But as early as 1907 Willie Fay saw the way the Abbey was going, and he protested that to potter along with peasant plays would kill the Theatre, "when we found no more pots to boil and no more news to spread." The truth is that from the beginning the Abbey was Lady Gregory's theatre, not Yeats's; it was her taste, not his, which defined its life. In 1926 the Abbey produced Brinsley MacNamara's *Look at the Heffernans,* a vulgar play which Yeats detested. It was a popular success . . .

> and at night the streets before the Theatre are packed with motors. I sat it out in misery and had two furious interviews with the author by telephone. Every country likes good art till it produces its own form of vulgarity and after that will have nothing else. (Yeats: *Collected Letters,* p. 713.)

But this was Lady Gregory's world: the evidence is on every page of her *Journals,* her incredibly bad taste, her inability to discriminate between an atrocious play by an Irish patriot and a masterpiece. She was a strong but crude woman; Yeats was quite wrong in thinking that she spoke his language.

She spoke her own language. The present state of the Abbey is understandable as an inevitable development from Lady Gregory's theatre with the connivance of certain weaknesses in the acting and production methods favoured there from the beginning. It seems clear that even in its heyday the force that through the green Abbey drove the flower was Talk; *theatrically,* the Abbey was uninventive. The typical Abbey scene (leaving Yeats aside for once and ever) is a kitchen with a table, a few hard chairs, and an open hearth; neighbours drift in and start talking. This is fine, and we are not promoting gimmicks, but it puts an enormous burden upon the talk, and the trouble is that Irish talk, even at its best, is curiously predictable; painfully exposed to self-parody. Vivid, highly flavoured, yes, perhaps even interesting in syntax and idiom, but strangely limited in its rhythms; you can check up on this if you like by re-reading Synge, O'Casey, Stephens, or O'Flaherty; or think how easily Frank O'Connor mimics himself when he has only his American readers to fool. These lush rhythms are shamelessly hospitable to sham; even Joyce succumbed to their phoney charm, notably in the *Portrait.* For many years now the Abbey has been living and partly living upon a dishonest stock of Abbey "characters," Abbey gestures, Abbey idioms, Abbey coat-trailing: the dramatists currently sponsored do not try to write plays, they try to write Abbey plays; they fabricate scenes and situations capable of being processed into the famous Abbey "style." The actor who sums up these procedures most revealingly is Harry Brogan, to whom every character is Joxer. The most cunning Abbey dramatist is John McCann.

Money is part of the answer. One of the directors of the Abbey, Gabriel Fallon, has demonstrated to me that when the Abbey pro-

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duces Art it loses alarming quantities of money, and it makes up the loss only by putting on an Abbey comedy. There is definitely an Abbey audience in Dublin; the Theatre is not sustained by American tourists. It would not take Dr. Dichter to specify why the Abbey comedies appeal to some Dubliners; it is always consoling to watch locally familiar life being lived at a lower social level than one's own, especially when the dramatist shows his characters being happy "in their way"; guilt is not involved. Only highbrows resent this pandering; to the country at large the Abbey is a local consolation and a tourist asset, like Killarney.

The only theatre in Ireland of which Yeats would have approved is the Belfast Lyric Theatre, an amateur organization directed by Mary O'Malley and blessed with "an audience of fifty or a hundred." Her dancers are not those painted by Degas, and if they fall short of the specifications given by the Old Man in *The Death of Cuchulain* ("the tragi-comedian dancer, the tragic dancer, upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death . . .") they preserve more of Yeats's drama than any Irish competitors. Some of the plays Mary O'Malley produces are more "verse" than "drama," and many are plays only by courtesy and intention, but Yeats holds her Theatre together, gives it a point. The gratifying result is that there is now an alternative to the humiliation of seeing Yeats's plays produced by middle-aged poetesses and their Verse Speaking Circles. It is an invigorating experience, this. For one thing, it now emerges that Yeats's plays are plays: Francis Fergusson is wrong, for once, in arguing that they are really a wishful extension of lyric verse into the theatre. If you see a decent performance of Yeats's Cuchulain cycle, you respond to it as drama, not as arty literature slumming on the boards; it doesn't strike you as, in the first instance, "a composition in the verbal medium." Whatever its limitations, it is drama. Awake and sing. If I had made this discovery more energetically and two years earlier, a certain book on the subject called *The Third Voice* would have been a great deal better than it is; but Mary O'Malley's Theatre was not then as "realized" as it is now and Yeats was not as finely "done." (Please accept my pseudo-Jamesian apologies.) Now a new thought occurs: what would happen if we were to see Mr. Eliot's later plays *not* produced by, or in the spirit of, Mr. E. Martin Browne? What would happen if we were to cross-fertilize them with Elia Kazan, and—let's be grandiose in our fancies—hand over Tennessee Williams to Peter Brook? Enough, enough, leave off.

Poetry and drama are rarely on speaking terms in Dublin's theatres. For many years Austin Clarke made a brave effort to find a home for scrupulous speech and gesture in the diminutive Peacock Theatre, but this has passed into the footnotes of theatrical history and is likely to be recovered only by the most devoted scholar. Mr. Clarke's own plays are mostly fragile fantasies, delicate inventions as handsome as *The Parlement of Foules* and nearer to Chaucer than to Mr. Wesker. (*Ques-*

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tion: why don't poets leave the theatre alone? *Answer:* because Shakespeare didn't.) Yes, but isn't it, well, shocking to see Mr. Eliot actually inside a theatre, down among all those people? And Austin Clarke, a lonely, sad, bitter man; what brought him from Templeogue to a chilly theatre—even a Little Theatre—when he could be sitting in his gentle home writing poems as fine as the best of Eberhart, Muir, or Ransom? (Yeats was different; he really enjoyed "theatre business, management of men," no matter what he said to the contrary in epistles to devoted women.) Austin Clarke is a cold prophet speaking to all the sad young men in a voice from which every tone of faith has been excised; he has been to each of the heavenly mansions and found them dives and now he has certain marvelously sick things to say.

Clarke is very much an Irish poet, but this does not mean that he is a "character," that he makes a career on the margin of show-biz, or that he thickens his accent when he goes to London. He is not Irish in the way in which William Carlos Williams is American; that's not it, either. He has no quarrel with England or Europe or Eliot, and he remains silent on many topics which prompt WCW to mail aggressive letters to foreign disciples. Clarke is an amateur scholar, and a lover of silence. What else can I say, except that he is a poet and—how can I prove this, at this late hour?—one of the best poets writing in English, Irish, or American. During the past few years he has been composing careful satires, not *Paddiads,* but deft meditations upon Irish absurdities. Most of them need local footnotes, which he supplies in equally deft prose. Here is one which requires nothing: "Marriage":

> Parents are sinful now, for they must whisper
> Too much in the dark. Aye, there's the rub! What grace
> Can snatch the small hours from that costly kiss?
> Those who slip off the ring, try to be chaste
> And when they cannot help it, steal the crumbs
> From their own wedding breakfast, spare expense
> And keep in warmth the children they have nourished.
> But shall the sweet promise of the sacrament
> Gladden the heart, if mortals calculate
> Their pleasures by the calendar? Night-school
> Of love where all, who learn to cheat, grow pale
> With guilty hope at every change of moon!

Reading Clarke's poems is an experience approximately ten times more chastening—yes, I've said it—than that of sloshing through Sean O'Casey's autobiographies or sitting through the tedium of *The Ginger Man* in search of corresponding verities. The poems come in slim volumes, privately printed at a suburban press. Mr. Clarke's distinction in contemporary Irish literature—and let us speak it slowly—is that he is at once an artist and a gentleman; the combination is beatable only in the short run.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

OF THE FIVE PRODUCTIONS I am about to review, two were superior, one fair, and two poor. There would be nothing remarkable about this breakdown which is just what one would expect the law of averages and Broadway to produce, except for the interesting coincidence that the two good productions were, in their fashion, improvisations; that the middling one was the work of an established, respected playwright; and that the inadequate pair were both adaptations of not exactly choice novels. And as it so often happens with coincidences, this one has nothing coincidental about it.

To start the season, Marcel Marceau returned with a program that introduced one of his company's mime dramas to American audiences. The first half of the evening was the usual solo performance by Marceau. Some of it was old material, but all of it confronted the audience with a true artist whose movements are as basic, as beautiful, and as soothing to the eye as the waves of the sea. It is now fashionable among the cognoscenti to decry Marceau's "repetitiousness" or "lack of growth" because, it seems, there is little in his repertoire that wasn't there ten years ago. What of it? It is like objecting that one has heard Starker play Kodály's Sonata for Unaccompanied Cello before.

Pantomime is both the biggest and the most limited art. It is big because, dispensing with words, it is the true Esperanto for bridging all times and all space; because gesture was there before speech was invented and is still there when words fail. But mime is also the most limited art because its range is restrained by definition: stray just so far from what everybody does and everyone recognizes, and you have lost your audience. If the common denominator is to be of any use, it must be the lowest one. Marceau's genius does full justice to the bigness of mime. There is no human situation that his grimaces and muscles cannot comment on, shedding light and love on all our actions. What is petty in mankind becomes the subject of much kinetic merriment, and what is evil or sad seems transmuted into the dignity of a tragic mask. And it is precisely in a number involving masks—all of them, of course, simulated by the naked face—that Marceau throws off the limitations of pantomime, which as a rule does not offer, like words, images of the new but only *aperçus* of the quotidian. In this number, a maskmaker rapidly slips on different masks one after another (in itself requiring spectacular facial flexibility and timing) until one, a particularly euphoric mask, gets stuck on his face. The man's desperate efforts to remove it, turning into the agony of failure, are expressed to perfection by Marceau's anguished arms, legs, and body

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in countertime to his beaming face. I need hardly spell out the meaning of the parable.

But the group effort, *The Overcoat,* based on Gogol's tale, was a failure that let down not only a superb short story but also the audience. Group pantomime, which, obviously, cannot depend on the rare, if not unique, genius of an individual, dissipates its effects into what is merely a cross between modern dance and ballet. But an earthbound ballet done in lead shoes, and a modern dance performed for puritans who cannot stand the sight of the human body. (How pale this looked compared to, say, the Jooss Ballet's *Green Table.*) Still, the music was pleasant; but it is a sad pantomime that should be heard, not seen.

The reviewers who were vying with one another to find the source of Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* (with Brecht, I believe, getting the largest number of votes) were no less misguided than those who, sighing or snorting, announced that it was absolutely unlike anything else. *The Hostage* is distinguished by the fact that it is absolutely like every other play—all other plays that ever were, rolled into one. What a marvelous "mélange adultère de tout!" Everything is here from Pirandello to Jean Genet, from Ernst Toller to the later O'Casey, and if anyone went looking in it for *Everyman* or Strindberg's *Damascus* trilogy, I'm sure he could find them too—just as Noel Coward, despite Behan's jibes at him, is likewise present. For this is truly a *Summa Theatrologica* for our time. And what you cannot find in the printed text is bound to be in the changes, additions, and ad libs which can be savored in the performances, whether put there by Behan, Joan Littlewood, the superbly imaginative director, or the actors themselves. I am sure that, like madras shirts, no two bleeding *Hostages* are alike.

Behan's play is about a lovable dolt of an English soldier held as hostage by some Irish Irregulars who have billeted themselves in an even more irregular Dublin establishment with a number of no less lovable Irish dolts for in- and cohabitants. If a certain Irish boy is hanged by the British in Belfast, the dopey little Cockney will be shot in Dublin. And this is the first respect in which *The Hostage* triumphs: the one kind of play it has nothing, but nothing, to do with is the Irish Patriotic Play, or even the Irish Irish Play, as once manufactured by Yeats, the young O'Casey, and the rest. If the play has any fundamental kinship with anything, it is with the *commedia dell'arte,* or its latter-day avatar, the burlesque skit. Even those of its lines that are the *sine qua non* of every printed and produced version, such as Miss Gilchrist's, the "sociable worker's" remark, "I'm pure as the driven snow," to which Meg Dillon (fractured Irish for Mary Magdalen) replies, "You weren't driven far enough," smack of stage or, more precisely, barroom improvisation.

Improvisation, surely, is one of the most appropriate genres for an era of the absurd such as we are, or think we are, living in. In *The*

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Hostage, the dead may rise to sing a song, the pansies take over the leadership of the police, or (in the American version) a faggoty Negro boxer carry a sign reading "Keep Ireland Black." For if the play, like all art, is to be a little more real than reality, it must, in our time, be a little more absurd than absurdity. This is by no means easy to do, and various approaches have been tried: Beckett anatomizes, as it were, the interstices between events that never quite occur; Ionesco takes an impossibility, treats it as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world, and works from there; Behan keeps the audience, actors, and playwright unprepared for and flabbergasted by what happens next, and so feels that he has a working model of our world. There is even a cue for the author to appear on the stage and deliver his own immediate feelings if his intoxication is sufficient or business at the box-office insufficient. If Genet, in *The Balcony,* saw the brothel as a world in which our libidinous dreams come true, Behan, in *The Hostage,* sees the world as a brothel in which every sort of happiness is possible—except ultimate fulfillment.

Joan Littlewood's direction performs a stage miracle: chaos is given shape without ceasing to be chaos. Miss Littlewood has integrated disorder into patterns: her art is an order that conceals itself. And the cast is as apt and balanced as a virtuoso chamber orchestra. Whereas *Face of a Hero* has an Ellen Holly, *Becket,* a Marie Powers, *The Wall* everyone but the two principals to contend with, here there is virtually no slack anywhere. And if I needed any additional evidence to substantiate the thesis of the world's absurdity, there was the group of businessmen sitting behind me who laughed and laughed and enjoyed themselves hugely, but who, when it was all over, exclaimed: "What a lousy play!"

In the career of Jean Anouilh the critical point when a dramatist begins to imitate himself has been reached some time ago. *L'Invitation au château*[1] was still a valid, fresh play—until Christopher Fry wallowed in it and left a ring around it. It has taken Anouilh's later plays all the running they could do, to keep in the same place. True, there have been exceptions, like *The Waltz of the Toreadors; Becket,* alas, is not one of them.

When Anouilh was younger (in plays like *Roméo et Jeannette, Le Voyageur sans bagage, La Sauvage, Thieves' Carnival*—even in movies like *Monsieur Vincent* and *Pattes blanches*), he saw life intensely, brilliantly: it was all black or pink or both. The world was a sweet pill coated with a thick layer of wormwood, and somewhere in the middle of one's choking on the bitterness there would be one fleeting, unforgettable soupçon of sweetness. Out of such black and rose madder are fairy tales made—made, surely, by very young people who remember

[1] This play is known here in Christopher Fry's version as *Ring Round the Moon.* Wherever I am unaware of an adequate English translation, I have preferred to use the French title.

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their childhood, or very old ones who have regained it. But there is no such thing as middle-aged bitterness or mellow pink-and-blackness. In this his middle-aged phase, Anouilh resorts to the paradox. It is an institution dear to Frenchmen, and Anouilh may have picked it up where it dropped from Giraudoux's hands. In any case, *Becket* is full of witty, epigrammatic paradoxes: blacknesses that are really pink, rosinesses that are actually black. The only trouble with whirling these parti-colored globes around with prestidigitator's speed is that what then meets the eye is merely grey.

Becket is civilized, skillful, theatrical, and almost never uninteresting. But it has very little light to shed on either the specific chapter of history with which it, presumably, does not even purport to deal, or on human nature, with which it does. Such clever paradoxes that a person's morality may be only aesthetics, or that the rich may be God's poor lost sheep, though adroitly handled by Anouilh, have long since ceased to startle. The thought underlying *Becket* is still the old Anouilh theme of pure young lovers so envied and hated by the corrupt world that they are driven into death, though not without leaving a luminescent trail behind. In *Becket* the lovers happen to be Henry II and Thomas Becket. Henry loves Thomas, and Thomas almost loves him. When Thomas finds his true lover in God, the king's crude sense of loving cannot keep up. But both loves are doomed by the pettiness and brutality of mankind. It is a theme too young, too slight, and too naive for the huge gear of the historical drama—and insufficient to flesh the great myths either (how pitiful are Anouilh's *Eurydice* and *Médée*); but by very careful translation into middle-aged terms—with dabs of bittersweet cynicism on a small greyish canvas, as in *The Waltz of the Toreadors*—it can still be effective.

Looking at *Becket* is like watching one of those charming Parisian ladies of indeterminate age and occupation about whom one cannot quite tell whether she is a whore risen to respectability or a socialite flirting with the gutter—both of whom, of course, would be dressed by the same *couturier*. Yet the soiled elegance, the cynical graciousness, cannot, in either case, leave us wholly unfascinated. And the production, appropriately enough, takes its cue from the play. Peter Glenville has directed with a sense of style, which, however, depends a little too much on trickery, such as an excessive zeal for geometric arrangements; scenery, costumes, and lighting are clever to a fault; and the music is remarkably effective except that it is not music. The acting, too, is strangely ambiguous. Anthony Quinn's Plantagenet king, despite the fact that he belongs on neither side of the Channel so much as south of the Pecos, and even though his mouth suggests the presence of potatoes well ahead of Sir Walter Raleigh's importing them to England, manages to grow in stature as the play progresses. Laurence Olivier, as Becket, in spite of relying rather too heavily on his old device of showing the whites of his eyes (as a sign, no doubt, for the close-up shooting

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to begin), and raising his voice to a falsetto pitched at the dogs, is still surpassed at this sort of bravura acting only by himself when he is better. The fault of both these men, like Anouilh's, is that they are a little too old for this job, a little too tried and tired, a trifle jaded.

All the same, except for some early disquisitions about Norman versus Saxon which might have come straight from the wastebasket above which Scott wrote *Ivanhoe,* and some embarrassing conversations between Becket and God that would befit Bing Crosby or Barry Fitzgerald in some movie about the puckishness of the priesthood, there is much pleasurable urbanity to recommend this play and production. And the evening has one glory: Lucienne Hill's translation. Abridged though it be, set it beside something like Lillian Hellman's adaptation of *The Lark,* and you have the most shattering object lesson. Where Miss Hellman gave us fractured French and friccasseed Anouilh, Miss Hill preserves admirably intact both Anouilh and the English language. She has got *Becket* down to a *t*; it is not her fault that it is not a double *t*.

There is always something wanting in a stage adaptation of a novel. Most recently Ingmar Bergman has warned against "filming existing literature"; what is even worse is staging existing nonliterature. To turn a good novel into a play is usually the equivalent of making a comic strip out of it, as comic books have frequently done. It is the admission of barrenness on the part of the dramatist, and the assumption of mental sluggishness on the part of the audience. To turn a bad novel into a play is merely to prolong an outrage. That there should have already been two such adaptations this season (three if you count the deservedly ephemeral *Valmouth*) is an evil omen. Let me start with the lesser of two evils.

Face of a Hero, which Robert L. Joseph has fashioned out of his own television play out of Pierre Boulle's novel, and which he will doubtless adapt into a movie, concerns a fighting young district attorney who knows that the town wastrel happens to be innocent of what appears to be murder, but hangs him anyway in what looks like the cause of humanity but is actually sheer vicious ego-propaganda. The way a more or less idealistic young man is corrupted into an egomaniacal demagogue by the sight of power and of the polluted world around him could lend itself to a decent novel or play. But there are three serious flaws here. First, the central incident is a piece of improbable coincidence: the D.A. is present at night on the private pier from which one of the playboy's spurned and pregnant playmates hurls herself—and there is also the coincident improbability of the fine young hero's neither stopping her nor coming to her rescue. (This begets a series of improbabilities with which I shall not burden you.) Secondly, a basic deterioration in the hero's character which, in a novel, can rely on the dimension of time as rendered by the very length of a book, requires, in theatrical foreshortening, greater skill than Mr. Joseph

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has, or better writing than M. Boulle has provided him with. Which leads into the third failing: that despite being spiked with some Madison Avenue lyricism, the language is stock (the intellectual young Negress speaks of "mah people," whereas the teen-age, poor-white-trash girl asks her wearied lover for "a side order of mercy, maybe")—either incredibly obvious or improbably cute. Add to this the schematic nature of the characters (the adoring secretary, the rich-boy-hating cop) and situations (a short but clumsy scene in which a neglected wife, weeping through her smiles, bids farewell to her overambitious husband), and you have the taste of this baby-formula for adults.

But *Face of a Hero* is saved from submediocrity by several astounding performances. George Grizzard, one of the extremely few younger actors of whom our stage need not be ashamed, makes out of the overprivileged juvenile delinquent a character a little larger than life-size, which, considering the pint-sized writing, is a personal triumph so noteworthy, and so satifying to watch, that no one who recognizes that acting is an art will want to miss it. Scarcely less impressive are Albert Dekker and James Donald among the older, and Kip McArdle and Edward Asner among the newer names. With five such wholly artistic performances to recommend it, *Face of a Hero* deserves to run beyond the petty pace of its dramaturgy.

As *Face of a Hero* capitalizes on the "prejudices and corruption of the backward South," John Hersey's *The Wall,* adapted by Millard Lampell, cashes in on the tragedy of genocide and the Warsaw ghetto of World War II. Mr. Hersey is the kind of novelist who has a sure eye for spotting obvious social problems (*A Bell for Adano; The Child Buyer*) and great human calamities (*Hiroshima; The Wall*). But writers who are artistically ill-equipped, i.e. morally unqualified, to deal with these situations are merely lice in the hair of such disasters—and what is more peripheral, and farther from the heart, than hair? The best and the worst one can say for Mr. Lampell's adaptation is that it is worthy of the book.

The method of this work, as of so many others like it, is to follow carefully the atrocity *cum* suffering *cum* heroism recipe: one grain of horror to fifty grains of colorful folk in sad, jolly, or edifying circumstances, and not one grain of truth. We get, then, a number of cliché plot situations told in stereotyped language, the whole sprinkled with the flattest specimens of so-called Jewish humor. Now for a few samples. Horror: a young couple being married and bravely joining with family and friends in a wedding dance, while off-stage we hear large numbers of their neighbors being dragged off to Auschwitz—to be noted especially is that the horror off-stage is sweetly palliated by love and stubborn courage on-stage. Humor: a kindly rabbi being offered a gift of shoe polish by a fellow-prisoner in the ghetto observes: "To shine these shoes is like feeding chicken soup to a corpse." Psychological insight: the passionate but unglamorous heroine to the cynical but

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golden-hearted hero: "You have such tenderness locked inside you, why don't you show it?" Poetic truth: the heroine to the hero, ecstatically, just after she broke through his defenses and he through her overripe virginity: "What is your favorite color? What were you like as a little boy?" On second thought, all these specimens should have been listed under one heading, "horror."

Put it another way: a bit actress is dragged across the stage by a bit actor; for this to image adequately something as big as the abominable destruction of tens of thousands of people, a word, a gesture, or at least a special kind of silence has to be found with which to lift this picture from the level of a snapshot to that of a symbol. In *The Trojan Women,* Euripides did it with poetry; in the Polish film *Kanal,* its brilliant creator, Andrzej Wajda, did it chiefly with certain movements, sounds, and stillnesses. But the pretentious platitudes and superficial posturings of *The Wall* merely add another heavy insult to one of the world's greatest injuries, and the atrocity of such writing is aptly seconded by the fatuousness of a comfortable audience, commenting after an evening of alternate tsk-tsking and guffawing on the magnificence of this drama. I cannot help thinking that people who can feel purged and uplifted by *The Wall* would be themselves capable of instigating just such unuplifting purges as those with which the play ostensibly deals. And to adapters like Mr. Lampell I would suggest that the next job worthy of their talents might be to adapt *Leaves of Grass* into a sonnet sequence.

What are we to conclude from this sampling of the Broadway season's firstlings? That realism has outlived itself? That only foreign productions have merit? That whimsy is the order of the day? I think not. Only this: that if we want the domestic products to prove as viable as the imports, we must have dramaturgy, not decalcomania; we must find actions and words that fill somehing bigger than stages and auditoriums: the imagination.

NORMAN N. HOLLAND

Two Films on Flesh

FAR AND AWAY the most significant film import of the last six months or so is thirty-eight-year-old Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima, Mon Amour.*[1]

[1] HIROSHIMA, MON AMOUR. Produced and directed by Alain Resnais. Story and screenplay by the novelist Marguerite Duras. Scenes in France photographed by Sacha Vierny. Edited by Jasmine Chasney and Henri Colpi. "She" played by Emmanuelle Riva, "He" by Eiji Okada. The sleepy and splendidly Stravinskian score is by Giovanni Fusco except the waltz for the love scenes in Nevers which is by Georges Delerue.

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A brilliant, trying picture, at once sensitive and blunt, tender and savage, fleshy and spiritual, pacifist and politically realistic, it has something for everybody. For the film historian, not only does it provide another item to flesh out that increasingly meaningless label, *nouvelle vague;* it also uses some important new techniques of flashback. For the film critic, it is just a fine and meaningful film, to borrow a Bergman title, a lesson in love.

Hiroshima shows us a Frenchwoman and a Japanese having an impromptu affair in that city, which she tells us "was made for love." As they embrace, she drily and monotonously reconstructs from her tours of the city the world-wide horror of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and thereafter; later, she recalls as though on an analytic couch her personal horror—the French killing her German lover in the brisk process of liberation and her subsequent shames and sufferings. The Japanese tries to persuade her to stay in Hiroshima, but she refuses. Finally, he admits defeat in the film's punchline. *"Ton nom est Hiroshima,"* she says, in their last meeting, and he sadly replies, *"Ton nom est Nevers—en France."* "One is appalled," says one critic, "to think that Resnais has spent all that time, effort, and money to tell us that East is East and West is West." True, in a way, that is all Resnais is saying, but by the end he has salted Kipling's tired dictum with much, much more.

If nothing else, the complexity of Resnais' technique rules out the possibility he is dealing with anything so banal as a study in nationalities. Here is no textbook flashback from Hiroshima to Nevers. Rather, as the film opens we see the locked bodies of the two lovers as they pass through four elements or "seasons." Their flesh is spattered with sweat, dew, and a premonitory something (mica) that falls and sparkles like radioactive ash; finally their flesh is bare. The film proceeds to interlace shots of the lovers' bodies with her reconstruction of that August horror from visits to the hospital and museum of Hiroshima—first the ball of fire and the mushroom cloud, then the dazed and mutilated survivors, the burned, scarred victims (cross-cut with the flesh of the lovers), girls with their hair falling out, a tortured bicycle, condemned tunafish, fused bottles of beer, melted steel and stone, the twisted bodies of the after-born children—there are no words for this kind of thing and thank God, few pictures. Over this visual horror and discontinuity, her voice recites a steady, flat, and deadly commentary, full of statistics and words like *officiel, les actualités,* and her lover repeats almost hypnotically the fact *"Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima"* (the first words of the film said over and over again in this opening sequence in his thick Japanese accent and toneless voice). Only after this litany of horror does the camera relax to the sweet, irregular smile of Emanuelle Riva playing the "She" of the film. Thus, already, when they dress and she leaves for her work—making a film on Peace ("What else would you make a film about in Hiroshima?")—Resnais has established the first of his themes and methods, verbally

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and cinematically peeling apart the laminations of fact and fiction overlaying the bomb. We are to contrast the tactual, actual, factual with the fake and pink film she is working on to "sell Peace like soap." While she erects celluloid images of herself against war, her lover, it turns out, builds as an architect.

He finds her in the film's peace parade and persuades her to come back to his office. They again make love, and afterwards, at a café, we hear the full story of the mysterious images that from time to time have broken in on the earlier recitation. The hand of her Japanese lover, twitching in sleep, suddenly became the hand of someone else, twitching as he lay on the ground. At one point, inexplicably but brilliantly, we suddenly, for no reason at all, looked up to an obviously not-Japanese balcony. In the café, she tells the Japanese she had had a German lover during the war. They were going to run away to Bavaria, but a few days before the liberation of the town, he was shot (from that balcony) by a sniper. She stayed with him all the day and night of his dying, and when the liberators came, the townspeople cut all her hair off. Her parents, ashamed, locked her up in the house and finally, as she went mad and her screams could be heard, they locked her in the cellar. Months later, she recovered, forgot. Her hair grew out, and one night she bicycled away to Paris, coming to her new life on a sunny August day when in Hiroshima, the bomb fell.

In joining the old love affair, the new one, and the bombing, Resnais insists on the essential sameness of human experience, specifically the bombing and the "liberation," love and war. Shots of her shorn head match shots of Japanese women pulling out their radiated hair after the bomb. They crawl out of ruins and cellars as she had done with her German lover. The lighting of her basement prison is the soot of Hiroshima. "Deform me, deform me," she cries to her new lover, "You destroy me—you are good for me." This sameness is implicit in the very technique of telling about the bombing and the German lover in the setting of the later love affair which fuses both episodes, Resnais' technique of unexplained flashbacks. It is intrinsic in the paradoxes of the setting in ugly, modernized Hiroshima—where the Ata river reminds her of her native Loire and the Peace Plaza is the place the bomb landed. Successive tracking shots through the streets of Hiroshima and Nevers take place at identical speeds. The Nevers sequences give off no sound. Rather, over images of France we hear the sounds of Hiroshima. Only a single cry of horror breaks through like remembered pain from past to present.

There is even a mythic quality to this oneness. Her Japanese lover tells her she is like a thousand women—the "She" herself identifies her German lover with her Japanese, speaking of his "German name" as though he were two incarnations of one man, crying out, "I shall triumph over you all." She is like a Venus (or Juliet or Perdita), to whom, after the canonical Frazerian round of fourteen years, her adversary

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Adonis returns. Indeed, she tells this second of her enemy lovers, "Unless there is a war, we shall not meet again."

Yet, mythic or not, personal sorrows obviously cannot be the same order of thing as the world-tragedy of Hiroshima, and Resnais would be guilty of a grotesque sentimentality were not his images of the sameness of human experience completely overborne by images of its essential separateness (*"Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima"*). Again, implicit in the technique is the theme. Her way of telling about her earlier love takes us in flashbacks out of the chronological time we all share into her private time, a Bergsonian, subjective *durée réele* in which we hear, first (if I can remember her memories in *her* order) of the schizophrenic episode and being locked in the cellar, then of her German lover, then her hair being cut off, then being locked in her room, then his death, and her bicycling to Paris.

Ultimately, though, her *"histoire de quatre sous"* cannot match the *"quatre fois"* she visits the hospital at Hiroshima; *"la petite coureuse"* running to her German lover and her doom cannot be compared to the Japanese women running through the bombed city. Beginning with the background for the screen credits (a negative of a shot of mutated plants which will appear in the body of the film), images of opposition and separateness dominate the screen. The lovers have to shout at each other over the honks of auto horns, and in the moment of love the telephone rings or someone coughs next door. Visually, against the choppy sequences and the harsh blacks and whites of neon neo-Hiroshima, there stands out the marvellously long and graceful pan following the girl as she bicycles to her German lover through the grey, barren landscape of Nevers. Similarly, Resnais' idiosyncrasy of cutting a discontinuous visual sequence against continuous dialogue or music on the soundtrack obliquely works out the same theme of sameness and separateness, as well as giving the film a curiously dual tone, at once literal and dreamy. *Hiroshima, Mon Amour,* as the actress herself points out, defines an eternal *principe d'inégalité,* a world doomed to foin and fight because it is compounded of identities and contrasts, a world in which a Frenchwoman loves first a German, then a Japanese, in which love is like war, newsreel fact becomes cinematic memory, and madness, as she says, is the same as intelligence.

Resnais himself—this is his first feature-length film; till *Hiroshima* he had made only art shorts—says the picture is musically composed, an andante or theme and variations. In the last third of the film, this music, this uneasy and dialectic interplay of sameness and separateness, draws to a close and, in doing so, the theme of the opening comes clear again. After "She" has recalled her first love, rushed off to her hotel to denounce herself to herself in her mirror for having now given up even the memory of her love, she returns to the bar. The Japanese has also come back and begs her to remain with him in Hiroshima. The rest of the night, she lets him follow her, ten paces behind, through the

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honkytonk streets and deserted nightclubs, close but untouching, like Ransom's equilibrists, until the dawn and her plane to Paris.

This section of the film, twenty almost wordless minutes, has been criticized as dull, and alas, it is. Yet, after the hectic of the bombing and the two love affairs, the emotional letdown is both unavoidable and supremely appropriate. It is precisely the feeling demanded by the paradoxical theme—that human union is neither permanent nor even, really, possible; we are separate even as we are inextricably entwined; one flesh is two. Thus, we the audience must pass through the same act of oblivion as "She" to learn what the film tells us. It is the very fact that she could forget the pain of her first love that makes her refuse to love again. *"Je t'oublierai, je t'oublie déjà,"* she tells her Japanese lover. We, too, in those twenty minutes, forget. We forget the marked flesh of Hiroshima, and we begin to think that this is just a film about lovers of different nationalities and races. As it is—sort of.

Their affair, his silent unpursuing pursuit exactly symbolizes their fusion and their separateness. The lovers pass through a bus station and she sits on a bench in the waiting-room next to an old Japanese woman. He sits on the other side of the old woman, who asks him something in Japanese and he replies in Japanese.[2] Similarly, when in a nightclub, a man tries to pick her up, the man speaks to her in English. And all the time, her lover is following her, with her and yet separated, as night, day, *"été comme hiver,"* or Nevers, Hiroshima, on the turning earth. The *"Ton nom est Hiroshima." "Ton nom est Nevers—en France,"* speaks not *of* nationalities but *in* nationalities of all the irreducible separatenesses and samenesses, that drowsy melody of attractions and repulsions which binds into one world all the circling human monads—quite like the particles in an atom which, if they love, explode.

It is a curious and instructive coincidence that about the time *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* was released, so also was an American film on a similar theme, *The Savage Eye*.[3] Ritually hailed as the opening splash in an American *nouvelle vague* (a notion which suggests only that the best native critical intelligence is not engaged in film criticism), *The Savage Eye* does have virtues, notably its photography in the high-grain, eccentrically-exposed, and erratically soundtracked peepshow style popularized by Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery*. The camera work is excellent of this kind, though this kind tends to appeal rather as a series of "candid camera" stills than as a fully developed cinematic

[2] It is, I suppose, part of Resnais' imagery of separation that there are no subtitles in this dialogue. I am told, however, by a beneficiary of wartime training that the old woman asks, "What nationality is she?" and the lover replies, "French."

[3] THE SAVAGE EYE. A film by Ben Maddow, Sidney Meyers, and Joseph Strick. Photography: Jack Couffer, Helen Levitt, and Haskell Wexler (and, though not in the credits, Joseph Strick). Judith McGuire, the divorcée, is played by Barbara Baxley; "The Poet" is Gary Merrill. By far the most interesting performance was that of the stripteaser, Jean Hidey.

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style. The film's most strange virtue, though, is the holy and relentlessly singleminded way it pursues its theme—the flesh.

The story concerns a woman hurt and disgusted at her husband's adultery ("mouth against mouth, belly against belly"). She has come to Los Angeles to divorce him, and from the first shot—contrasting her loneliness with others greeting and kissing at the airport—we are treated to a grim and brilliant Jonsonian revel of food, flesh, and fucus. Through her nauseated eyes ("The touch of human skin makes me sick") we see: a beauty parlor, a girl's nose being tapped into shape by a plastic surgeon's hammer, fat women in a reducing salon, people pawing pets, a drunken and osculatory New Year's Eve party, the bloated bodies of wrestlers and the bloated minds of their bestial audience, a transvestite party, hands playing cards, a superb sequence of a stripteaser, a magnificently horrifying and disgusting record of a cheap faith-healer laying hands on his hysterical and unhappy patients. These grand, sickening scenes all make fine, though somewhat pathological, documentary. Unfortunately, they are overlaid with commentary by a voice (called, no less, "The Poet") who announces, "I am your conscience" and proceeds to conduct a dialogue with the heroine in the most treacly and modernique "great iron bird" style of the patriotic radioplays of World War II brought up to date with the high-porosity religious prattle of our own Eisenhoverian decade.

The denouement is equally foolish. The heroine, upset by the faith-healer bit, drives out onto the freeway and runs her car into a truck. She gets a transfusion, and because, I suppose, one squirt of plasma makes the whole world kin, she decides she loves humanity, which her conscience, "the Poet," promptly identifies as "paranoid . . . hooker . . . arsonist . . . maniac . . . rapist." After such forgiveness, what knowledge? Not much, and "Amen," concludes the Poet, the picture, and the audience.

Grimly, the film seems to prove it is our sensibility and our American fate that, instead of the tenderness of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour,* we can blurt out only the most infantile, oral version of love, that of *The Savage Eye,* in which human beings are merely "spasmodically hungry at both ends." After the long trek of the Puritan heritage across the plains to the golden world of 77 Sunset Strip, we seem to have left ourselves only the alternatives of anally hating the flesh or orally worshipping it. *Quousque tandem?* Someday some American film-maker must emerge who can, in the soft words of Solomon's song, comfort us with apples.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Ballet and Music Chronicle

REAPPEARING HERE after an interval of three years, the Royal (formerly the Sadler's Wells) Ballet again brought us its large, well-trained, well-rehearsed company headed by its great ballerina Margot Fonteyn, and its richly mounted, carefully prepared productions. These again included its opulent reconstructions of two great classics of Russian imperial ballet with beautiful scores by Tchaikovsky, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake,* and on the other hand several new works. Two were evening-length ballets by the company's principal choreographer, Frederic Ashton—a new version of the old comedy classic, *La Fille Mal Gardée,* and a new dramatic ballet, *Ondine*; two were shorter pieces by its younger choreographers: Kenneth MacMillan's *Le Baiser de la Fée* and John Cranko's *Antigone.*

Ashton's most distinguished achievements, for me, have been his comedies *Façade,* to the music of William Walton, and *Wedding Bouquet,* to the music of Lord Berners and the words of Gertrude Stein. And in *La Fille Mal Gardée* his comic gift gave us brilliant things like the clog dance of Mother Simone that might have been a number in *Façade,* the grotesque solo of the half-wit suitor Alain, the episode in which Colas made love to Lise while she danced a pas de deux with Alain—but these with a considerable amount of comedy which the audience found more amusing than I did. The work also offered resourcefully contrived classical solos and duets for Lise and Colas; but for me it was much too long and included material that I found boring. John Lanchberry adapted the original music of Ferdinand Hérold; Osbert Lancaster designed the scenery and costumes; and there were excellent performances by Nadia Nerina as Lise, David Blair as Colas, and Alexander Grant as Alain.

Ondine, for me, is one of the works of Ashton that have exhibited only the uninteresting ingenuities of the resourceful craftsman. For his adaptation of the story of the involvement of a water sprite with a mortal he devised movements that he was quoted as saying were intended to suggest "the ebb and flow of the sea" and to achieve "an unbroken continuity of dance, which would remove the distinction between aria and recitative," but that had no merit for me beyond the exquisiteness of their execution by Margot Fonteyn. The work had an ugly contemporary score by Hans Werner Henze that was inappropriate to the character and atmosphere of the story; on the other hand it had appropriately spectacular scenery by Lila de Nobili; and it had fine performances by the other principals, Michael Somes, Julia Farron and Alexander Grant.

Inevitably, as I watched the detail of MacMillan's setting of Stra-

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vinsky's *Le Baiser de la Fée,* I recalled what Balanchine had produced at the same points, and noted that MacMillan achieved only a pleasantly inventive use of the ballet idiom where Balanchine had achieved wonderfully imaginative metaphors for the dramatic action. At the end of the village scene, for example, the MacMillan pas de deux of the Fairy and the Boy was one that could have occurred in any other ballet, whereas in the Balanchine version the pas de deux was the Fairy's violent taking possession of the Boy. So with what followed this episode: in the MacMillan version the Fairy conducted the Boy to his Fiancee in further supported arabesques and turns; whereas Balanchine at this point gave us one of his supreme examples of *fantaisie Balanchine*: the Fairy stood behind the limp body of the Boy, her right arm extended over his shoulder and pointing forward and with her left hand gave him a push that impelled him a few steps; moving up behind him with her extended right arm still pointing forward, she gave him another push that impelled him another few steps; again she moved up behind him with her extended right arm pointing forward and gave him a push that impelled him off the stage; and as she followed him off with her extended right arm pointing forward the curtain fell. What remains to be added about the MacMillan piece is that the scenery of Kenneth Rowell was overpowering in design and color, and that the performances of Svetlana Beriosova as the Fairy, Donald Macleary as the Boy, and Lynn Seymour as the Fiancee were excellent.

As for Cranko's *Antigone,* it told its story of violence largely in expressive movement derived from the modern dance that leaves me unaffected; it used a noisy score by Mikis Theodorakis and had an obtrusive setting by Rufino Tamayo; and it was performed well by Svetlana Beriosova, Donald Macleary, David Blair, Gary Burne, Michael Somes and Julia Farron.

The special event for which the New York City Opera Company was able to secure the participation of Leopold Stokowski this year was a double bill of Monteverdi's *Orfeo,* first produced in 1607, and the contemporary Italian composer Luigi Dallapiccola's *The Prisoner.* In *Orfeo* beautiful pieces sung by the chorus frame the musical articulation of the essential dramatic action by expressive recitative over harmonically powerful orchestral writing; and some of the recitative is extremely moving, but the totality of it gets to be monotonous. However, this monotony is more bearable, I found, than that of the twelve-tone vocal declamation and orchestral screaming of *The Prisoner.*

Stokowski, conducting for *Orfeo* a small orchestra that included a number of archaic instruments and for *The Prisoner* a large modern orchestra, operated with authority and taste to achieve effective musical performances, in which the French baritone Gerard Souzay sang the title role of *Orfeo* with distinction, and Anne McKnight, Norman Treigle and Richard Cassilly coped successfully with the difficult vocal writing of *The Prisoner. Orfeo,* moreover, was effectively staged by

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Christopher West in the style of a seventeenth-century court entertainment, with sets and costumes of the period by Donald Oenslager. But the production was blighted by the dancing—ineptly contrived by Robert Joffrey—with which Mr. West saw fit to accompany not only the songs of the chorus but the dramatic recitative of the principals—a notably unsuitable and disturbing example being the gesticulations of the black figures around Orpheus as he addressed his moving appeal to Charon. But nothing spoiled Mr. West's staging of *The Prisoner,* with scenery and costumes again by Mr. Oenslager.

The company presented another new work, *The Inspector General,* by the German composer Werner Egk, in which recitative that was no more expressive than speech was accompanied by elaborately contrived orchestral detail that was weird-sounding and pointless. With the music adding no humor to a libretto that was itself not amusing, the occasion offered only a few bits of funny stage business contrived by William Ball, and was a waste of his talent and efforts and those of Herbert Beattie, Ruth Kobart and their associates in the performance.

Mr. Ball's talent was better employed in his effective and amusing staging of the action of Mozart's *Cosi fan Tutte.* This year Beverly Bower was the inadequate Fiordiligi who sang *"Come scoglio"* without the powerful phrasing and *"Per pietà"* without the largeness of expressive style they call for, and who was unable to execute the florid passages of *"Come scoglio"* accurately in the fast tempo set by Julius Rudel. Elsewhere, however, her singing was good; and the excellent singing of the other principals—Frances Bible, Judith Raskin, John Alexander, John Reardon, James Pease—in the arias and the beautifully blended ensembles contributed to making the performance one of the company's most distinguished achievements. I might add that it strengthened my opposition to the use of an English translation: one tends to concentrate attention on the English words—both the words one does hear and the others one doesn't hear and strains to hear—and in this way attention is distracted from the music.

Erich Leinsdorf appears on the Metropolitan Opera Association's roster not only as conductor but as music consultant. It is a position one would not pick him for after the spectacular fiasco of his one season as director of the New York City Opera a few years ago; and he appears to be advising Mr. Bing very badly now. The advice Mr. Bing was getting eight years ago led him to the right decision that if one was going to produce Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* one should produce the *Boris* Musorgsky wrote (and it was no violation of this decision to have Karol Rathaus strengthen the orchestration in a way that preserved Musorgsky's own "sonorous image"—to borrow Aaron Copland's term—but made it carry more effectively in the opera house). Mr. Leinsdorf's advice now has led Mr. Bing to the wrong decision to produce Musorgsky's *Boris* as reorchestrated and in part rewritten by Shostakovitch in a way that gives the work the impress of Shostakovitch's crude and vulgar mind.

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If Mr. Leinsdorf's advice had anything to do with the Metropolitan's producing Verdi's *Nabucco* this year I would say that in this matter too he advised Mr. Bing badly. In this early work one hears—mostly in the choral passages and the orchestral writing—manifestations of the powers that will achieve impressive results in later works; but what they achieve in this one doesn't add up to a work that calls for or justifies production by the Metropolitan: there is nothing in it comparable with the great moments in *Macbeth,* for example. As for the production, Teo Otto and Wolfgang Roth provided handsome sets and adequate costumes; Gunther Rennert deployed the chorus and principals on the stage as effectively as I can imagine this being done; Thomas Schippers, operating with impressive authority and control, paced and shaped the work with precision, plasticity, continuity and cohesive tension; and the principals were some of those the Metropolitan considers its best—Leonie Rysanek, Rosalind Elias, Cornell MacNeil, Cesare Siepi, Eugenio Fernandi—not all of whom, however, achieved what was expected of them. In the cruelly taxing writing for Abigaille Rysanek was able to produce the spectacular high notes with steadiness and power, but her singing in the lower range was unlovely in tone and afflicted with a strong quaver. Siepi's voice, when he used it in full volume, also exhibited a strong wobble in addition to its hoarse quality. And MacNeil's singing too was made ineffective at the start by its tremulousness, but was impressive when it acquired steadiness. On the other hand there was rich-sounding singing by Elias when she didn't have to go too high, and beautiful singing by Fernandi.

Though the five Beethoven sonatas which the celebrated Russian pianist Sviatoslav Richter played at his first recital in New York began with the early and boring Op. 2 No. 3, they didn't include even one of the late sonatas: he followed Op. 2 No. 3 with Opp. 14, 26 and 54 and ended with Op. 57 (*Appassionata*). Thus he revealed nothing about his manner of dealing with the greatest of Beethoven's piano works; but the performance of Op. 2 No. 3 served to reveal right at the start an impressive sureness and rightness of shaping of phrase and structure, together with a spectacular technique which at the end produced a sensational performance of the finale of the *Appassionata.* The first movement of the *Appassionata* exhibited in addition the tendency to extreme dynamic contrasts that was evident also in the excessive pounding of the octave passages which alternate with the quiet minuet in the first movement of Op. 54. These were things one heard in addition to what one heard at other times, notably in the opening variation movement of Op. 26: the precise and beautiful execution of phrases shaped with sensitivity and grace. And at all times one heard completely thought-out conceptions of the music and complete mastery in their realization. But I must add that beautifully and perfectly made as the performances were, they didn't, for me, achieve the expressive communication achieved by Schnabel's less perfectly executed performances of these sonatas.

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BENJAMIN DE MOTT

Time Styles

> . . . A brunette is revealed upon a spotlit divan. . . . She is unfolding a letter—presumably from her lover, as it instantly spurs her into a randy thresh. She bites her lower lip. Her eyes gyrate. She thrusts her hands inside her panties; then kneads her breasts; with the dogged deliberation of a pre-breakfast physical-jerker she writhes out of gossamer in a solitary sexual charade of half a dozen postures and speeds. . . . One of the [other] dependable routines . . . is the flagellation act—a nude girl whimpering pleasurably as she cowers in the glare while being stock-whipped by a man in Russian boots. After a demonstration of sado-masochistic torture, this usually ends in a climax of the girl turning the whip upon the man in a transport of ruttish revenge. . . . You can see a naked girl strangled with a stocking. You can see girls seduced by a gorilla and a demon ('The Devil and the Virgin'), married to Frankenstein's monster, or making love to a life-size male statue. . . . You can watch girls in endless permutations of [the] divan fantasy—alone in a bedroom, or on a raft, or up a hay-loft, in narcissistic sexual athletics. You can see girls drawing phallic inferences from objects in a dozen different ways. . . . You can see harem orgies and slave-ship spectacles, with an elaborate choreography of flogging and brutality. You can see, in a science-fiction dance, a man arrayed as a gigantic electric plug flashing coloured lights as he connects with a girl arrayed as a gigantic electric point. . . .

THE SENTENCES ABOVE appeared last summer in a *Spectator* report by Kenneth Allsop on the strip clubs of Soho. The report was solidly informative: it disclosed that there are now two hundred of these tanks in London, many of them large (the Raymond Revuebar has 70,000 members), most of them democratic (one club numbers among its membership thousands of commoners, eight millionaires, ten MPs, thirty-five peers, and more than fifty knights), all of them providing opportunities for tough young laddermen out to make the town (the owner of the Revuebar—a thirty-two year old, happily-married churchgoer with two children, a maroon Bentley Continental, a handsome house in Wimbledon, and a personal income of £2000 weekly—began his career as a fourteen dollar a week potman in an Essex pub). The reporter himself was not given to fancy argument about the quality of life in our exciting times; his line was that of near-Victorian disapproval. He

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implied that the tankmen who defend flagellation routines as necessary changes of pace ("Unless you introduce new stuff, everything's going to get rather monotonous. Isn't it?") were immoral, and that the church-going proprietor of the Revuebar is a thug; he viewed with contempt newspaper articles explaining that the strippers are chaperoned by their mothers or by resident clergymen, and on the claims of the girls themselves, which have been expressed in banners held aloft in Soho protest marches (WE ARE NICE GIRLS), he wasted hardly a grin. But his allusions to the old-fashioned moral vocabulary which nobody now knows reduced only a little the interest of his report. Mass experience of personal unreality, urban excitation, discontinuity, frenzied efforts to recover the real, faith in the final law of production and consumption—the story had adequacy of a kind to all these marks of the moment. You could read it believingly without switching off the brain, without lying to yourself for an instant.

The point of alluding to such a piece in an account of another clutch of new novels is not to push the concept of journalistic touchstones; it is simply to restate the commonplace that fiction is only one among many kinds of writing that claim to put people in touch with truths of the age.[1] When novelists stood alone as reporters, the question whether they were right or wrong as historians, whether they themselves were in touch, was more or less irrelevant; at present the question is coming to take precedence over all others. A glance at an item like Henry Beetle Hough's *Lament for a City* helps to clarify this observation. The right way to abuse Mr. Hough's book, long ago, might have been to complain about dull exposition and conversations in Drew Pearsonese, that idiom of phoney inside reporting which tells people what happened behind closed Committee doors ("One last word on the other side, though. You know as well as I do that the world is split into bitterly opposed ideologies. Our country is under attack from the outside and from dangerous enemies within. We're living over a lot of powder kegs" etc.). Just now, though, these flaws seem less crippling than the book's notion of history. *Lament* is a long, high-minded New England chronicle that addresses itself to the fortunes of a distinguished newspaper in a city like Springfield. Its crisis occurs when the journal is purchased by a reactionary—a character who, at roughly the present moment, "stands on basic Americanism" and "believes in what he's doing," and preaches "the utter iniquity of the UN, the rottenness of all labor unions, isolationism in new dress." The reader is asked to regard the new owner as a symbol of the key histori-

[1] LAMENT FOR A CITY, by *Henry Beetle Hough*. Atheneum. $4.75. DRAGON'S WINE, by *Borden Deal*. Scribners. $3.95. THE JOURNEY, by *Jiro Osaragi*. Knopf. $4.50. THE HOUSEHOLDER, by *R. Prawer Jhabvala*. Norton. $3.95. OUR VISIT TO NIAGARA, by *Paul Goodman*. Horizon. $3.95. NIGHT, by *Francis Pollini*. Olympia. 15 NF. MODERATO CANTABILE, by *Marguerite Duras*. Grove. $1.75. GOLK, by *Richard Stern*. Criterion. $3.95. CASANOVA'S CHINESE RESTAURANT, by *Anthony Powell*. Little, Brown. $4.00.

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cal event of the century, namely the obliteration of the feckless, radical spirit by tough, man-eating, big business fat cats. The evidence that toughness has lately absented itself from all sides is only one among many reasons for rejecting this view of things. There is nothing to guarantee that if the writer had transformed his ferocious roughrider into, say, a Knight of Misrule playfully outraging the pieties of a progressive burg like Rochester, New York, he would have succeeded in indicating, in a fashion more appropriate to 1960, the frailty of the mass grip on liberal platitudes. But adjustment of the latter kind might at least have enabled him to produce something better than fossilic villainy. As it is, Mr. Hough seems a victim of faith in invisible coherence—or in ignorance. He has heard of no war save the one waged by McCormick against Ickes; his city-scape holds no suggestion of the discontinuities that can at least be deduced from the story of the Essex potman; in his imagined present all men know who they are, believe what they say, and act, on TV, in accordance with their beliefs.

Since modern experience *is* urban experience, city novelists (the classification is appropriate for the author of *Lament for a City*) work under an especially cruel light. They cannot claim that they are standing somewhere "back out of all this." But city hicks are not the only writers whose mis-timing is easily detectable. The Southern Gothicist who attempts to pass himself off as a country boy with country wares is nevertheless working in a form that has always made noisy claims as an allegory of the modern situation—which is to say, he is anything but ineligible for scrutiny as an informer. Gothic is represented this season by a novel of Borden Deal called *Dragon's Wine*. Like almost every work of its school, the book is mythy and litry. Its author has *Macbeth* in mind—Duncan is done in at a sawmill by a thane named Homer Greaves—and provides a number of chorus-like interchapters, spoken by Greeks named Buster, Mister Mack, and Odell. Deal Faulknerizes freely ("How is it that one says, *You are the hand that held and aimed the gun and pulled the trigger, I am the bullet that you expressed through the climate of time toward the target. You are not only the aimer and puller, you are also the shaper of the gun, you grooved the riflings in the very barrel of the womb that launched me, you gave not only the aim and the impulse but whirled me into the stabilizing whirl so that nothing, not even love or compassion or pride or possession, can stay me from my course*"), and he strictly obeys the time-mongering convention ("Time. Time is a fabric to you, there is a clock in your soul like unto the clock in no other man. To all other men, you learn painfully through accident and circumstance, time is a ribbon that stretches from now to beyond memory and every day each man unrolls a span of the ribbon, in the unrolling losing a bit off the distant end far back in a yonder. But time, to you, is a patchwork quilt spread on a quilting frame, with patterns patterned here and there"). In addition (another sign of faith in form), the writer defines an I-Thou

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relation between man and nature, the latter personified as a white pig named Queenie:

> [Homer] is God, king, survivor—but he is alone. He walks the earth with a distance around him and the only good time of the day is the dusk when he can lean against the pigpen and scratch old Queenie gruntingly behind the ear.

Readers unconcerned with history will probably argue that Mr. Deal's most serious mistakes are attributable to a decision to tell part of his story from the point of view of the pig. And this narrative innovation is hard to praise. Queenie's diction is over-Jamesian ("[Homer] was here now. He had not departed from her ambience"), and she herself is too nostalgic and too vain ("Fragrant smells, of the earth and of growing and once in a while a scent of the distant woods, stirred a dim memory in her brain of the woods days when she had been a white sleek lovely little sow. . . . Those had been the free years; but she had accepted captive love [from Homer-Macbeth] without cavil or regret . . ."). Furthermore, her gift for (as it were) drawing people out, though equal to that of any Colette courtesan (at one point Queenie "translates" a young boar "instantly out of son, piglet"), does not conceal a harshly demanding woman within:

> She became an old lady foolish with love. It was she who found the logs now and opened them and stood aside for him [the translated boar] to scoop up the fine grubworms. It was she who nosed and butted him with a heartrending tenderness suffusing her soul and it was he who, annoyed, pushed her arrogantly away when she bothered him at the wrong time. She demanded him once again to the gully. . . . She chose the place for sleeping and made the bed out of dry leaves while he waited for his comfort. They lay down together, their bodies touching in sleep, and they both slept very soundly on this night. She was first up in the morning, waking him before he was ready, and they set out for the gully again before they had even stopped to eat.
>
> It was an idyll. . .

But not all the unattractiveness, or unreality, of these swinish pages can be blamed on what is called the point of view. The counterpart of the novelist's belief in mineral, vegetative, and animal souls is his conviction that the life and times he is interpreting will support a tragic hero—and it is a question which belief requires the greater suspension of intelligence. Homer Greaves is described as ruler of the world, "king," "conqueror," "hero," and "Homer-regent;" one who feels "the inalienable divine right of burying and marrying and naming and sundering"—but the relation of the epic tone to the homely experience described is always obscure. No doubt there is a cart road somewhere

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that leads from the world of *Dragon's Wine* to the world of Faubus, textile plants, and manufacturers whose idea of I-Thou is High-yawl; but the road is so long, so rutted, and so pig-blocked that the man who would rather read a *Life* editorial on sit-ins than travel it need not think himself a fool.

The road to Tokyo or Delhi is of course a good deal longer even than the one mentioned—and it is for that reason that novels like Jiro Osaragi's *The Journey* and R. Prawer Jhabvala's *The Householder* find enthusiasts: readers approach them in a mood of greater dependency than can be summoned for books that tell about familiar places. The mood is not invariably appropriate, however. *The Journey* is a sentimental rambling tale of MacArthur's Japan which centers in the doomed affair of Japanese "modern lovers"—a Tokyo stenographer and an apprentice black marketeer. It is filled with flowers and mountains and *haiku* and professional voices of wisdom, and it works up several mildly amusing time-paradoxes (someone looking at a Japanese stately home asserts a preference for a modern, cheery "Western-style house . . .;" a marriage broker puffs a girl as a student of the tea ceremony and flower arrangement, and then hears her tell the suitor that she is a lover of pinball games and Lux). But the juxtapositions and contrasts are in the end irrelevant to the tale itself. Though decorated with box-tops and coke bottles, *The Journey* is about heroically renunciatory lovers who have selves to trust and recover, who think of their lives as manageable and of their affections as changeless objects. It may or may not signify that the absence of such figures from novels like Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (which, as Anthony West pointed out in *The New Yorker,* is incomparably more interesting than Osaragi's book) is the apparent key to their interest. And it would be foolish to claim that the only defect of the novel at hand is its dated definition of Western-ness as pure hustle. But *The Journey* does give an impression of evasiveness that seems traceable (in light of Mishima's accomplishment) not simply to complications in Japanese culture, but to disabilities of the writer—a man of feeling who, unable to master the immediate, takes refuge in the timeless, universal kingdom of bad art.

The case of Prawer Jhabvala (to whose work Narayan's stands in almost the relation of Mishima's to Osaragi's) is in many respects similar to that of the Japanese. *The Householder* is about a young, newly married language teacher in a provincial college—a figure without a shred of the verve of Narayan's Chandran. It offers a number of faintly ironic confrontations of East and West intended to suggest that the goals and attitudes of the educated Indian classes are like those of "everyone else." (A Western German tourist sick with love for the mysterious East is met with gabble about great strides forward, Five Year Plans, and "six million tons of steel," and a voice that implies that the Indian character is alien to the modern nature or spirit—"a Westerner's nature is so that he feels he must conquer the world"—is defined

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as fatuous.) And in clarifying these goals and attitudes it borrows situations and tones from the American family comic strip: problems of newlyweds, apprentice cookery, visit from mother-in-law, first baby, asking for raise, introducing wife to boss. It is no clearer that the strips were satisfactory visions of the quality of Western life than it is that the impulse to conquer the world is still Western. And it is doubtful that the situations named are adequate for the expression of realities known by Eastern classes in which a violent pro-Sovietism is known to thrive. But even if the case were otherwise, even if news from exotics could be delivered in a Staten Island format, in a voice of pallid charm, few men of sense would tune to that voice in preference to Narayan's mad rough laughing variety.

To return home and fling the latter word, *charm,* at Paul Goodman (currently represented by a collection of stories and ruminations called *Our Visit to Niagara* and by a social treatise not available at this writing) seems at first glance absurd—even though wise men know perfectly that charm can be a positive quality. Shrewd, knowledgeable, close to the present, this writer is no soapseller; he has thought earnestly and well about the character of the age. Yet charming is the fair label for a good number of the pieces in his *Visit.* The tide of feeling that runs from the writer toward the performers at "A Senior Concert of the High School of Music and Art," as he contemplates them as symbols of "the pride and aspiration of many poor cultured homes," is completely engaging—not merely because of its openness, but because it is accompanied by backcurrents of awareness (mainly of disjunction) that check the passage toward sentiment:

> The red-headed boy in the shaft of light has been doomed to sing in a new way; you can see the guilt and suffering of his absolute break with the generations on his stubborn and imploring face. He is begging for us to listen to him, but stubborn to persist in his way whether we will or not. And why should we pay attention to him when he has broken with us? But also both he and we know that there has been no break at all; we are laughing about it underneath, at the same time as we are set on making one another very unhappy.

And there are other pieces in the book in which emotion is complicated by social analysis without being neutralized. (In "The Architect from New York," for one, an example of the courage of affection is offered simultaneously with a view of the aimless urbanizing inorganicism of contemporary small town life.) Weighing his failings in a headnote, Goodman observes that his stories and novels are myths, and that his people "turn into nature spirits, genii of the place or angels;" he acknowledges that unfriendly critics say that his fiction is "inhuman." The charge has substance, and what can be added to it, on the basis of items like "A Lifeguard," is that until Goodman's pieces fly into the empyrean they hardly seem imagined at all. His fiction, that is to say,

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stands at one pole or the other, fact or spirit, and asks its reader to concentrate chiefly on the writer's feeling or the writer's ideas, rather than on the narrative or the drama. But although the best of Goodman, the most revelatory, is to be found in *Communitas* and in critical chapters like the one called "Such Freedom As Is Possible Today" in *Kafka's Prayer*), it would be a mistake to believe that his fables have no truths to tell. Love for fantasy and impatience with fact are opposed in his writing by an instinct for contradictions of feeling *and* of ideas, and the latter on more than one occasion produces a readable sign of the world.

The claim that such an instinct, or power of intellect—a better name for it—is now indispensable equipment for the novelist who wants at the minimum to be interesting is probably to go too far—but a novel like Francis Pollini's *Night* does little to strengthen the opposite position.[2] The book is about an episode of recent history, the collaboration of American prisoners with the Chinese during the Korean War, that most readers first heard of in a series of articles by Eugene Kinkead. These pieces on soldierly identitylessness were done in the familiar noncommittal vein: three out of four American prisoners appear to have collaborated to some extent with the enemy: I myself adopt no attitude toward this event, do you? But the details they provided plainly were worth interpretation. What did the "disgraceful behavior" signify? Cowardice? Failure of I and E programs? Taken as a most substantial referent for phrases like "the sense of irreality," the episode seemed to rank as one of those rare public events about which full understanding would be invaluable. Mr. Pollini offers less than fullness, but he does move inside the experience, into the prison camps, and he does create them as something more than a set of statistics. And although his book is crude and chaotic, it has certain successes. At those moments when the writer himself is *not* functioning as a guide, the irrelevance of terms like loss of shame and cowardice (as labels for the "disgrace") is powerfully felt; anomie, ego malfunction, canting mindlessness announce themselves in speech after speech ("I confess to givin' my Chief here a hard time, and I'm a first class bastard for it, and I recognize my error and weakness, hangovers from the days when I was nothin' but Capitalist flotsam"). And a dozen implications (for the national character) of mass understanding that comfort is virtue appear with striking clarity. But despite these successes, the book is a document rather than a novel. There are few if any signs of a reflective intelligence operating on the matter set forth; the article writer's strategy of uncommittedness is replaced by empty contrasts of softness (evil) and toughness (good); the attempt to discover meaning loses itself in arty-illiterate mono-

[2] This book, which was rejected by several American publishers, figured in a censorship episode last summer. British postal authorities and Irish Customs confiscated copies sent to Hugh MacDiarmid and Brendan Behan for review. The complaint was about four letter words.

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logues and fantasies. To face the latter is to discover that a dramatization of significant events by a writer capable of feeling them is more revealing than simple reportage, and that, "left to themselves," significant events and dramatization do not produce literary art.

Precisely what the events are in Marguerite Duras' *Moderato Cantabile* is difficult to say. The novel is another new wave production, allusive, mysterious; reading it (as someone may already have noted) is like watching the images flow in stillness in a movie house after the sound track snaps—the world will break back in, but when? when? (The book was filmed almost on publication.) A lady of standing in a French town is drawn into a low bar by an unexpressed fascination for the place as a scene of a crime of passion; she returns again and again to it—accepting the company of a factory worker, alcoholic stimulation, and bare nerve-end conversation (not like *Hiroshima*) that somehow gives her an illusion of fresh selfhood. Admirers of Duras speak of her "artfully repressed murmur" and link her with Virginia Woolf, and the Frenchwoman's feeling for the pulse of hysteria is, in fact, of uncommon exactitude. Her power, though, does lie all in her obliquity. The experience for the reader—an hour or so spent scrutinizing the tranced movements of some shoreline crab picking with indolent ferocity at a mussel—is suggestive, but no hint as to the proper names for the suggestions is provided. The absence of objects (targets for scorn or hatred), aside from the casual inhumanity of a music teacher, or the aridity of polite dinner conversation, rouses irritating suspicion: the writer seems too knowing, too certain that if understanding and analysis were allowed to enter from the blank margins of her page, *chic* would abandon the scene. True, the questions that arise are clumsy and blunt: what is the name for this life, these people? is the sickness personal? cultural? But the implication, out of so much obliquity, that the answers are too plain to be specified somehow stimulates distrust.

Richard Stern's *Golk* is never oblique and answers virtually every question it poses, yet, for a reason that can be named, it too inspires a measure of wariness in its reader. To name the reason without first acknowledging the genuine achievement would be less than just, however. It is claimed that first novels are invariably scarred by self-indulgence; *Golk,* a first novel, is not: at every moment it has energetic command of its subject, and on occasion it testifies with admirable force that intelligence can achieve (in a novel) remarkable adequacy to contemporary fact. The book is all about Metropolis, as might be assumed; undisturbed by awareness that the *kitsch* bazaar is choked with views from the thirtieth floor, Stern walks straight out of the elevator into the life of hot flesh and admass. His hero, a man who enters the labor market for the first time in his late thirties (as an aide to a TV genius with a candid camera program), does his thinking in fast cabs, showy bars, producers' offices and celebrity cages, and chases chix from the

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Longchamps enclosure (not the one by the Wallach's) to Newport. The swift cornering and the talk, both of which owe something to Bellow, are of the town, and the details are of the kind favored by writers who shudder at the possibility of being thought square. But remarkably, owing to the writer's manipulation of a single, sound idea, the result is better than an exercise in pacemanship.

The idea in question is that, for mass man, proof of existence can be found in public humiliation; its ramifications are made to appear in an account of a TV gimmick. The producer who employs Mr. Stern's hero (the latter's name is Hondorp) does not merely snoop; he rigs situations in order to create images of fatuity and asininity. About the situations themselves certain complaints can be made. In inventing them the author of *Golk* shows less brilliance than Mr. Terry Southern, whose problems in *The Magic Christian* were also of the kind that only invention can solve. But if Mr. Stern's situations are less comic than they might have been, his eye for meaning is unusually sharp. The key moment in a "golk" production occurs when it is revealed to the gull that he has been gulled, that his ridiculousness has been recorded on film. The response to this moment, a comment on the intense need for reassurance that life is no dream, is pathetic: the gull, the character who has been turned into a leering ass by the camera, rushes forward to sign a release, even begs for the privilege of having his own degradation pumped out to the millions who study The Bulb. Stern's method of sharpening the reader's sense of the implications of such behavior is to complicate one rigged situation with what is called family feeling. The hero of the book has spent most of his life in attendance upon his father, an absurdly sententious and self-pitying dentist; in exchange for his TV job he is required to watch, without protest, the humiliation of his own father on film—to accomplish on the spot, as it were, a total dehumanization of self. The man passes his test: he makes no remark except about the technical quality of the assassination; but thereafter he is stunned by his father's eagerness to see the image of his own mortification. The handling of this moment of shock is brisk, economical, and shrewd. Young Hondorp sits with his father on the night that the latter is made the butt of millions, and observes his response: watching "the twin fixities of his father and the machine, the clomping jaws and sucking jowls of the one and the mechanical frenzy of the other, [he] has a vision of reciprocal simultaneous cannibalism." Afterward the son first reports that his father "might have been watching Sullivan, no, someone wise like General MacArthur," then that his father "saw himself being foolish and disowned himself," finally that "He saw a fool . . . but it wasn't himself." And with the latter revelation the young man's own descent into personal nothingness begins.

The reason for wariness about all this is that *Golk* has an obvious design on its reader, and is over-schematized. It is possible that, for the

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writer, the meaning did not precede the experience and that the key figures did not exist as Discontinuity and Dehumanization before they became Father Hondorp and Son; but for the reader that possibility does not seem strong. The objection can be overstated, to repeat. Stern is perhaps over-clever—and over-indebted to Nathanael West or even to such a book as Dennis' *Cards of Identity;* but he does make scenes that move and act out of their own centers, his ear is first-rate, his details are fresh, his pages are often funny and rarely sluggish—and he has, in sum, better cause to believe in himself as a writer than a dozen over-praised younger novelists of recent years. Indeed, were it not for the presence of a book of Anthony Powell in the season's batch, it would be difficult to maintain that specifying Stern's deficiencies was not simply another critical act of asking-too-much.

The five volumes now issued of Mr. Powell's "Music of Time" series cannot be glanced at in a paragraph, and, because of their interdependence, little of value can be said briefly about any one of them—including *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant,* which is partly about the musical subculture of London, partly about upperclass responses to the Spanish War, partly about marriage, partly about the decline of Stringham and the ascent of Widmerpool. The writing is loose, and the novelist does assume (mistakenly) that his reader will place the figures of earlier books instantly on their appearance, and his manner is that of the almost random chronicler. But the very randomness seems, oddly, to be the proof of ultimate soundness in the whole. There is more than wit here, though much of that; there is a subtle, undesigning vision of the way in which the virtues of a power class—imperturbability, assurance rooted in myth—become the perfect, pathetic agents of the adjustment of a class to its ruin. Powell's "beautiful time," when it arrives, is likely to last longer than C. P. Snow's; even now his offhand, unpretentious, backward excursions are recognizable as measures of precision, instruments that tell the hour with hardly a second's loss. The past that he creates, and the present that Mr. Stern only a shade too abstractly defines, complement each other, as might be expected. But what counts for the addict is that, in doing so, they sustain for a while longer the conviction that the world of virtuous strippers and electrical rape has not become a world that can only be reported, and may yet become a place to be understood.

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EARL MINER

1660 and All That

SINCE THE TRICENTENARY of the Restoration of Charles II has gone by almost unnoticed in this country, we may well ask what the epoch and its literature mean to us. Was it in fact "the gaudiest and the bawdiest era in English social history?" (blurb, *Restoration Reader*).[1] Was its poetry a "Court poetry . . . declining ultimately into a mere social amenity, a decorative exercise, practised in the margins of Courts that had no noble aspirations at all," as Miss Wedgwood says on her last page? Or was it rather, as a simple roll call suggests, the age of Milton, Dryden, Cowley, and Bunyan; of the first modern prose and the first real literary criticism? Was it in music the age of Lawes, Purcell, and Blow; in philosophy the age of Hobbes and Locke; in politics the age when political parties were born, of movement from despotism, through Clarendon's compromise, to Glorious Revolution; in architecture the age of Wren; in science the age of the Royal Society, of Halley, Hook, and Newton?

There is no need to continue naming. Obviously the blurbist notion is inadequate and wrong; equally obviously any interpretation of Restoration literature must account—as Dryden alone would show—for the extraordinary interaction between literature, music, art, philosophy, politics, and science. The fact that most treatments do not, and that the usual image is one of bawdiness and artifice can be explained in small part by the distortions of the Whig historians and in greater by the Romantic revolution in taste. Yet the lack of appreciation of Restoration literature is not primarily a matter of tastes differing. It is one of ignorance in which we are all at fault. With Spenser, Shelley, and Tennyson, Dryden is (or seems) one of the hardest of our great poets. When scholars ignore the basic yet crucial problems (who has ever intimated Dryden's concern with Platonism, or his taking history even more than music as his subject in "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day"?), and when critics ignore or attack what they do not understand, the general reader may well be excused for prejudice. Once one understands Spenser and Dryden, he is free to indulge his taste and prefer, if he wishes to, the Metaphysical style.

[1] A RESTORATION READER, by *James Holly Hanford*. Grove Press. $2.45. POETRY & POLITICS UNDER THE STUARTS, by *C. V. Wedgwood*. Cambridge. $4.75. RESTORATION LITERATURE, by *K. M. P. Burton*. Hutchinson University Library. 10/6. THE POEMS OF JOHN DRYDEN, edited by *James Kinsley*. Oxford. $33.60. 4 vols. THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, edited by *James Blanton Wharey* and *Roger Sharrock*. Oxford. $10.10. THE POEMS OF JOHN OLDHAM, with an introduction by *Bonamy Dobrée*. Centaur Press. 21s. ETHEREGE AND THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY COMEDY OF MANNERS, by *D. Underwood*. Yale. $4.00.

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To a decreasing extent, Restoration writers are still half-obscured in a mist of Romantic taste (not that the great Romantic poets have been the beneficiaries), still often judged by the pre-Freudian moral fulminations of MacCaulay, and still commonly regarded as little more than "classics . . . of our prose." Some reasons for the continuation as well as some important signs of change can be found in a deskful of recent books. To begin with a familiar overture, James Holly Hanford's *Restoration Reader* is back in print with the same selections and commentaries. Hanford is too wise to call the age the "gaudiest and bawdiest," but he is not above suggesting occasionally that he operates a Restoration peep show. Pepys's affair with Deb Willett is ever so much tamer than he hints. His other selections for his chapter on "The Empire of Love" show people either like or rather better than ourselves. Scholars should either scratch or avoid prurient suggestions. The rest of the *Reader* is about as good as any such collection could be. If the "Old and New Science" is hardly either and if there are occasional omissions, most of the sections are excellently handled.

In *Poetry & Politics under the Stuarts* the distinguished historian, Miss C. V. Wedgwood, has written a curious book. It is not clear whether she intends poetry to illustrate history or history poetry. She strangely apologizes for temerity in discussing poetry, which she even more strangely distinguishes from prose by attributing to it a certain "manner." Since there is no scholarly news in the book, it must be aimed at the general reader. If so it is odd that the poets he will have heard of play no special role. I cannot understand why, with all her knowledge, Miss Wedgwood fails to distinguish between the very different historical and political views of, say, Butler and Dryden. Perhaps it is because of uncertainty. Dryden is now "transcendant" (p. 74), now "conventional" (196); now lacks an "original and penetrating mind" (145), now is "great" (196). Clearly Miss Wedgwood likes the earlier seventeenth century, chills to the later. The chapter on "Poets at War" is the liveliest (historians do like a good fight), but the book may confirm the prejudice of some Americans against a stereotype of facilely written, superficial English scholarship.

How little stereotypes hold can be judged by Miss K. M. P. Burton's *Restoration Literature*. It is conscientious and as learned as a handbook dare be—but it is also wooden in style, dogmatic, and erroneous in judgment. Her avoidance of subordinate syntax and her eight-to-ten-word sentences belie all stereotypes—"There was a general trend towards material prosperity. . . . Most of all, perhaps, men had hoped for security" (p. 15)—rendering even dogmatism dull. If a literary historian chooses to accept MacCaulay's viewpoints (see p. 206) at this late hour, he ought also to possess his style. The strangest part of the book is its palinode—"Apologia: John Dryden." After damning with faint praise and outright attack (the dramatists, poets, and fiction-writers are dismissed in a chapter as "Entertainers") for 222 pages, she recants for

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four. Those whom style does not annoy or prejudice put off will, however, find very judiciously selected quotations.

Miss Burton's honest uncertainty about Dryden is probably typical of present taste. Yet he is the test of our understanding of the age as also the writer by which the age must ultimately be judged. Certain aspects of his greatness are generously allowed—he is, as Dr. Johnson said, the father of English criticism; he is the first English writer of a prose at once modern and great. His general historical position as a poet is also clear. He is as much the last poet of the former age, with its lyric, epic, and dramatic interests, as he is the first of the Augustans, with their mixed genres and public modes. The variety of forms he either devised or perfected lie open to our sight. All this affirms his greatness, but it is surely just to say that our age has not *felt* Dryden's poetry, that it has lacked that firm understanding which would make him a part of our lives.

Dryden is not primarily a satirist. His essential greatness grows from his rich exploration of history and the values he saw in it. The particular cast of his mind was, as he said, skeptical, and the initial difficulty of his poetry may be found in his habit of using particularities to suggest generalities or values which skeptically question and qualify each other. The opening lines of *Absalom* show such skeptical balance to perfection. Yet beyond the tonal and thematic balance lies an ideal code, a realm where he finds the values for which a Mac Flecknoe is ironically praised or a Charles is encomiastically magnified—in each case the point is the same, since Shadwell and Charles should be what they are praised for, even if they are not. The particular vitality of Dryden's style harmonizes order with energy:

> Then hot and cold and moist and dry
> In *order* to their stations *leap*.

His verse texture is not as rich as Pope's, and his poetry does not seem to take its own pulse as does Donne's. Instead, the poems are complex wholes in which the parts are integrated to the highest degree. For example, the "Song for St. Cecilia's Day" loses its point unless we see that music is made a metaphor for history: the span from creation to Judgment Day is Miltonic; in between, the progress of civilization is imaged in increasingly sophisticated musical instruments, as also the more and more elevated passions they arouse. Without understanding the nature of the whole, we can see only virtuosity.

The "Song" is especially Drydenic. Its occasion is an Augustan public celebration; its mastery of lyricism is pre-Augustan. Its support of a harmonious order, its elevation of art as a symbol of civilization, its belief in man's ability to make limited progress in history, and its final religious orthodoxy wittily expressed are all characteristic. As one of our greatest poets, Dryden deserves as handsome an edition as James Kinsley's *Poems of John Dryden*. Apart from a mechanical problem or

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two, the edition is nearly perfect if accepted on its own terms. Its terms constitute the present British conception of an edition—accurate text, the relevant historical facts, and crisp glosses. Like Dr. Johnson at the completion of his dictionary, Kinsley may take pride in completing in a few years and single-handedly what our academies require many years and many hands to do in their way.

The edition has but one serious flaw. The pagination is continuous through four volumes and the commentary is all in the back of the fourth. If one wishes to find a poem, one must search through the table of contents, given in full only in I, or consult the back of IV, where only a page number is given. The "References and Abbreviations" employed in the commentary (IV) are given only in I. A reader of *The Hind and the Panther* needs II for the text, IV for the commentary, and I for identification of references in the commentary. He may have looked through III on his way to the poem. A less workable procedure may scarcely be imagined.

The procedure apart, Kinsley's edition is a model of modern British editions. Only when our American preferences are interposed can any real objections be raised. Kinsley's errors are those of omission—in particular, there is no general literary view of Dryden, no real coming to grips with the poems. The reader of the "Song" is left to learn for himself that it concerns history. There is no sign whether Kinsley likes or dislikes Dryden, or that he imagines one poem to be better than another. The known facts about Dryden's poems were never better presented, but there is little critical insight or literary imagination to carry us beyond. Is it only an American prejudice to think such an edition very unlike Dryden in spirit?

The virtues of Kinsley's edition are primarily British, but we may share in its triumph. It is more impressive than two other welcome editions of Restoration writers, Bunyan and Oldham. The new edition of *Pilgrim's Progress* calls Bunyan into question once again. His is the one great work of prose fiction in the century—but why? E. M. W. Tillyard's characterization of it as an epic explains its stature, not its nature. In its own day its religious purpose earned its approval, but few of us can share an asceticism lumping together bawds, wives, and children as hindrances to salvation. Bunyan is not dated in essential purpose and technique, however. He is concerned with spiritual survival: "What shall I do to be saved?" (No one can understand the Restoration without realizing that the question is posed independently by other writers—in the very same words by Cowley, for example.) Bunyan's technique is allegory, which has the artistic advantage of making everything seem significant. This may be superstition in life, but it is sound doctrine in art. It was allegory which brought form and greatness to English fiction, first in Bunyan, then in Swift. Dryden's use of allegory shows, with these examples, that the older sacramental view of life was capable still of enriching art.

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The new edition of *Pilgrim's Progress* is welcome both for its stimulus to reconsider the work and for its own sake. It is a revision of the old Oxford edition of J. B. Wharey, Roger Sharrock having redone the whole. His choice of a new copy-text is repeatedly justified by locally small but in sum considerable improvements. The generally helpful commentary he adds (pp. 312-54) will assist students and even the more experienced. The introduction is another matter. In 118 pages two problems are discussed: the date of composition and textual authority. The English criticism of garrulous American commentary seems very strange here. Not a reader in a thousand will have any interest in reading (or paying for) such laborious discussion of texts and title-pages, which should properly appear in a bibliographical journal and only be summarized in the edition. Too many editions these days are only excuses for textual critics to exercise their talents, thereby precluding an expensive rival with literary information. Sharrock was probably too closely bound to Wharey's pattern.

The new edition of *Pilgrim's Progress,* however fussy, is indispensable. Bonamy Dobrée's bringing Oldham back into print is also welcome, though the edition differs from Sharrock's in most respects. It is a readers', not a scholars' edition—and high time Oldham's harsh voice was heard again. Dobrée's introduction has all the grace and calm sense we expect (none of Sharrock's Transatlantic English: "A summing-up can now take place," p. cvii). He does, however, make heavy weather in explaining why some fifteen of Oldham's poems have been omitted. The simple fact is that his is a photographic reprint of Robert Bell's mid-Victorian edition. Since Bell omitted them as offensive to Victorian taste, they obviously cannot be photographed. It is extraordinary that Sharrock should get small credit for thorough work while Dobrée should seem to get all for little: Bell, whose notes are most helpful, is casually mentioned twice at the end of the introduction, not at all on the title-page. Dobrée cannot have imagined the implications of the method: might I not introduce an edition of Shakespeare, casually mentioning late in my introduction that one Samuel Johnson, whose preface I silently omit, is the real editor?

Such editions, especially Kinsley's fine *Dryden,* should form a basis for a reappraisal of Restoration literature in which American minds also have their part. Indeed my prejudice is for the American style in editions. Too much commentary—of a literary not textual nature—is better than too little, especially when the writer is as central as Dryden to an age as little understood as the Restoration. Moreover, if the revaluation is to amount to anything, editors should be "engaged." There should be perceptible differences between editions of a poet and a scientist, and an editor should commit himself to a literary stand on his subject. I have no idea of Kinsley's opinion of Dryden. Such playing safe suffers by comparison with Grierson's *Donne,* where the mistakes alone have proven remarkably fertile, and where the close literary

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evaluation helped make modern understanding possible. Our English friends may undeniably claim a greater editorial neatness—a greater regularity, as Dryden would have said. Yet may we not paraphrase Dryden, asking, "Now what is more easy than to write a regular English edition, or more difficult than to write an irregular American one?"

National differences are clearly involved in such preferences. Yet it would be too much to hope that a few editions, even if all met Kinsley's standard, would dispel the erroneous stereotype of the Restoration. Other writers besides Dryden need other illumination besides editions. Etherege, for example, goes unmentioned by Hanford and Miss Wedgwood and is dismissed as an "Entertainer" by Miss Burton. Dale Underwood's *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners* will henceforth condemn such omissions and dismissals. Drawing upon most of the best scholarship, upon a careful reading of earlier and contemporary drama, and upon his own sound literary judgment, Underwood places Etherege intellectually and artistically. Intellectually, he is shown to utilize skeptical, *libertin* thought to question man's motives and behavior, without falling into Rochester's nihilism. As a writer, he is shown to have a serious comic purpose embodied in skillful dramaturgy and in a language that is rich, for all of its appearance of unstudied raciness. The organization of his book may be questioned, but it is vigorously written, abounds with suggestive remarks about other writers, and is the best critical study of a Restoration playwright to appear in a very long time. Underwood is said to be engaged in a study of the literature of the whole period. May the day come soon: with such studies and with new editions of Dryden, Bunyan, and Oldham we may indulge in what is not merely a Jacobitic literary hope that MacCaulay's roundheads will yet fall and that the literature of Charles II will be restored.

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JOHN THOMPSON

A Catalogue of Poets

ONCE WE HAVE FOUND OURSELVES SUPPOSING that there should be poems, then probably we should be glad that there are so many of them. Most of us never know it, but there are hundreds of books of poems published every year, a fact most of us must contemplate with mixed feelings; does anyone want to read that much poetry? But here, anyway, are listed the works of twenty-two poets.[1]

It was a big bundle of books, even for books of poems, although it held by no means all the books of poems published this season. The size of the bundle made it seem unfair to exercise the reviewer's usual privilege, defense, and maybe responsibility, of choosing only those that interested me and ignoring the others. Someone has written all those words, someone has paid to put them all in type. Somewhere they should at least be named. So I have chosen this other method of being unfair. The books will be mentioned, the names, I hope, will be spelled correctly; the comments will be brief and not very analytical, instructive, or fair. There are many different kinds of poetry and nobody can like them all.

I think you know as well as I do the other commonplace thoughts with which we should begin to think about the poems of our contemporaries. Of course it is true that a pretty-good poem is really no good at all. The poet's friends are glad when he writes a pretty-good poem. Many people can do it; with the help of friendly critics and a lot of persistence maybe almost anyone who cares to try can do it. Pretty-good novels and pretty-good essays, those kinds of writing that have so much more reference to things beyond themselves than poems

[1] NEW POEMS—1960, by *Witter Bynner*. Knopf. $3.75. COLLECTED POEMS, by *Lawrence Durrell*. Dutton. $5.00. A CORRESPONDENCE OF AMERICANS, by *Jack Hirschman*. Indiana. $2.75. A LITTLE GESTE, by *Daniel G. Hoffman*. Oxford. $3.75. LUPERCAL, by *Ted Hughes*. Harper. $3.00. THE WOMAN AT THE WASHINGTON ZOO, by *Randall Jarrell*. Atheneum. $3.75. THE SUMMER ANNIVERSARIES, by *Donald Justice*. Wesleyan. $1.65, paper; $3.00, cloth. COLLECTED POEMS, by *Weldon Kees*. Stone Wall Press (Iowa City). $18.00 (Limited Edition). SONGS, by *Christopher Logue*. McDowell, Obolensky. $3.00. THE TROUBLE WITH LOVE, by *Eve Merriam*. Macmillan. $3.50. THE WANDERING JEW, by *Robert Mezey*. Cornell College (Iowa). No price. POEMS 1930—1960, by *Josephine Miles*. Indiana. $3.95. NEW AND SELECTED POEMS, by *Howard Nemerov*. Chicago. $3.50. KNOWLEDGE OF THE EVENING, by *John Frederick Nims*. Rutgers. $3.00. POETS OF TODAY VII: *James Dickey, Paris Leary, Jon Swan*. Scribners. $3.95. THE SCREENS AND OTHER POEMS, by *I. A. Richards*. Harcourt, Brace. $3.95. WHITE SUN BLACK SUN, by *Jerome Rothenberg*. Hawk's Well Press. $.75. WILDERNESS OF LADIES, by *Eleanor Ross Taylor*. McDowell, Obolensky. $2.95. FIRST POEMS, by *Lewis Turco*. Golden Hill Press (New Hampshire). $2.75. YOU, EMPERORS, AND OTHERS, by *Robert Penn Warren*. Random House. $3.50.

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do, will always be easier to take, even for very literary readers. But poems that are merely good have their own kind of honor; when they aren't too widely mistaken for the real very good thing, then they should have their acknowledgement. If a poet can present some experience that is at least partly his own, in words that are at least aware of the current dialects of speech and writing in his language, then those of us who are specialists in the literary—at least us—should know of him. Nobody else will.

I wish now, though, for an anarchic moment, that the bundles of books we take were not sorted into bundles of novels, bundles of poems, or bundles of essays, but just bundles. What if we were made to wonder quite seriously why it is that essays really are, these days, more interesting than poems? What if we had to write about *The End of Ideology* and about *You, Emperors, and Others* all at once? Would editors really mind filling up their magazines with poems, if they thought the poems were *interesting*? But you and I immediately know many answers to these demeaning notions. There is a responsibility about poetry. Poems are not merely interesting, not merely thought. Poems are art, are action, the saving motion of feelings that help keep us alive. . . . But then, why do we not care more about poetry?

First, some old campaigners, or, if the categories have to be more exact, some old campaigners in this division and a few who, like I. A. Richards, have brought with them a long service record from another branch. Since the publication of his first book of poems in 1935, Robert Penn Warren has won many kinds of fame as novelist, playwright, critic, editor; his last book of poems before the current *You, Emperors, and Others* won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. His first poems sounded sometimes like a fierce Marvell; these newest ones sound, sometimes, like a fierce Ogden Nash. As much as ever the poems insist that men's hearts, hands, faces, their very clothing, are basically no good; but Warren writes now with the reckless abandon to feeling of a man so experienced that he is assured absolutely of his own feelings. These feelings find expression, in large part, in the intent to wound the feelings of us others, the readers, the "you" of the title. The long looping lines and self-parodying rhymes, like the insistently unpleasant details, the specific items with which we, average men, are expected to identify as with a recital of symptoms, swirl and crack at us like painful whips. That is what satirists have always wanted. But the jokes and the energy and the strength are as real as the intent to wound. It is as if the poet, determined to give himself and us bad news, is also determined to admit that there is pleasure in it, there is in fact pleasure in anything, even a ferocious glee. And there is a reason beyond this for the manner of the poems. "Ballad: Between the Boxcars" is a violent and vicious meditation on a boy run over by a train. It ends saying, this is the world whether we like it or not:

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Despite all we can do to reject it utterly, including
this particular recollection, which now I
would eject, reject,
but cannot.

Lawrence Durrell, like Warren, appears as poet with some of the illegitimate glamor of the successful novelist adhering to him. (I still feel somewhat contaminated with the conviction of the general reader that writing poetry is a bit like painting china.) He says he dates his "poetic appearance" from the publication of *A Private Country* in 1943, although he had been writing poems for years before that. With their exotic places and scenes, the Mediterranean atmosphere of their anecdotes and love songs, Durrell's *Collected Poems* have some of the strange air of authentic phoniness of Robert Graves, and often his poems resemble Graves in tone. They have, too, a lot of experience in them, much feeling, much thought. More often than Graves's poems do, they seem interesting notes or sayings rather than finished objects. He has Graves's fondness for the clean line, as well-written as prose. These poems are no challenge to the state of Poetry, as Durrell's novels are to the Novel; sometimes they say next to nothing, in a way so ordinary you could never guess, or care, who wrote them. But the best of them are really interesting, they sound as if they come from a real life, and they succeed in calling us from the deadness of circumstance.

Witter Bynner, born in 1881, published his first book of poems in 1907; it won the praise of Yeats among others. His *New Poems—1960* is a collection of over a hundred lyrics in a form of his own, very short, very gnomic poems, each maybe a dozen or so phrases in length. They present some small insights, fancies, or paradoxes, and perhaps those who like the Zen anecdotes or enjoy thinking about the sound of one hand clapping will like these too. But they go right by me without a trace.

I. A. Richards began writing poetry at the age of sixty in 1953. *The Screens* in his second book. These verses are about epistemology, mountain-climbing, words, hydrogen bombs, all the concerns of a greatly learned and joyous mind. They are full of jokes and lore and difficulties. They can rise to eloquence, but most often work their way along in a kind of crabbed fluency of short rhymed lines; the orginal and odd dialect of the poems is hard to understand sometimes—sometimes, for me, at least so far, impossible. But it is always a true voice speaking, and it does honor to the language of which it is a part.

The Woman at the Washington Zoo is Randall Jarrell's sixth book of poems. The first was published in 1942. His concerns here are lonely women and men, children, fairy tales, art, poetry. These receive all the tenderness his witty prose denies to its subjects. His favorite form is a musing undramatic monologue, full of nostalgia, pre-conscious reveries easily invaded by the Imagoes that come and go like witches. His

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language now is absolutely direct and simple, with no oddities or strain, but full of little repeated phrases that are like repeated musical phrases or the steps of a dance. They call attention not only to themselves, to their meaning and to their quite appropriate functions in the dialogue of the characters, but they have a way of reminding us of language itself, of the very idea of phrase, the enchainments of sound and reference of our tongue. This style gives Jarrell for the time being at least a limited range of subject and feeling: nostalgia never gets beyond itself into memory. There are a number of translations from Rilke that have become real English poems, and there is a sample of the *Faust* Jarrell is translating. That is an attraction of opposites indeed.

Poems 1930-1960 contains new work and selections from Josephine Miles's first five books. The voice of all these poems is quiet and clear, modest and brave, measured and yet often jaunty; the language is absolutely fastidious in its accuracy and tone. In the newer poems, she less often passes things off with a joke, although it seems there is still much that is withheld in the special ironies of these perfectly-phrased lyrics. In one long poem about Russia, the tone is extended in an impressive sobriety, but kept down to a particular earth again and again with her insistence that everything must be measured from her own local street corner with its supermarket, school bus, and newsboy. Josephine Miles's works are less spectacular, less subject to the intervention of miracles of language than are, say, Marianne Moore's or Elizabeth Bishop's; but these works now, and I think enduringly, register with wonderful precision something rare in English poetry, the special feeling and intelligence of the feminine.

Howard Nemerov's *New and Selected Poems* gives anyone who has missed his other books the opportunity to have the best of them, together with fifteen new poems. Nemerov is as witty and as intelligent as any poet now writing; he can get off perfect epigrams as well as maintain long, relaxed, fluent meditations in verse. If I say I have the sense that these poems are the fruits of observation rather than of participation, I am not entirely sure myself that I know what I mean. Nor, in so far as I do know, am I so sure this is true. It may be I have not yet come to understand his central theme, and so perhaps the poems are not scattered or peripheral, but stand for a sense of things that I haven't grasped. But anyone ought to be glad to read all the poems in this collection.

Knowledge of the Evening is John Frederick Nims's third book of poems. Who could take exception to Nims's intelligence, to his range of interests, to his serious and skillful work in the forms of English verse? If this were another occasion, though, I should like to argue the case of his style. He would be a good subject for a long discussion of one kind of poetry, because the antagonists could agree, I suppose, on his valuable qualities, and could isolate that particular phrasing which one of them would like and the other would not. Too briefly and too

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unfairly, all I will say is that what one would call vigor, the bright flash of sensation and the energy of condensed and manipulated language, another would call strain. There is such a thing as over-writing; and that is all I will say of it now.

Unless there are reasons I am unaware of, someone who knew Weldon Kees and who knows about him should write it all down. He was born in 1914 at Beatrice, Nebraska, worked on *Time,* wrote poems, played jazz, made "experimental films," and painted in the style of Tenth Street. He disappeared, apparently a suicide, in San Francisco in 1955. His poems collected here are the best documents I know for a certain atmosphere of that decade after the end of the war.

These poems are extremely knowing, both in their recognition of the public manner and meaning of the times, and in their uses of the poetic styles that were most valid then, Empson, Auden, but more than that, simply the best kind of period style, flexible, intellectual, prosaic, unpretentious, and wonderfully evocative. It was a style that became academic very soon, but it served its purpose which was chiefly to allow intelligent and sensitive people to declare themselves about their concerns. Its manner did not include the deeper private concerns, or included them indirectly and symptomatically as aspects of guilt. Kees seems to have been aware of his role as a representative of his time, unrecognized as he was. His character Robinson, who figures in many of his best poems, mumbles in his sleep,

> There is something in this madhouse that I symbolize—
> This city—nightmare—black—

And everything goes very badly in Kees's poems, everything is in decay, the destructive wish is omnipotent in bedroom and bar, in city streets. Reading his poems, knowing nothing about Kees himself except what is in the poems, I think of those poets who have fallen in wars, like Wilfrid Owen.

Eve Merriam has published a half-dozen books of poetry. This notice of her most recent volume, *The Trouble With Love,* will be only that, a notice, plus a few unkind words. I have not read her other books. These poems are chiefly about love. The forms of the poems are "free," that is, a phrase is printed as a line, a group of phrases or clauses is printed as a stanza. The statements about love and the expressions of the author's sentiments give every indication of sincerity, and as private communications they would doubtless be very agreeable.

Lupercal is Ted Hughes's second book; his first won much praise, and this one is even better. Hughes has two tones, one an abrupt eccentric speech with something from Hopkins and Dylan Thomas, but without their particular passions. Sometimes this is very effective, with a condensation of phrase, or the sound of condensation anyway, that can give strength to conceptions which might, for another poet, be only pretty conceits. In his less mannered voice, he can be so accurate in

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description and so apt in attribution that his poems about birds or fish become dramatic and even shocking visions of life. "Pike" is the best poem of all those of the twenty-two writers reviewed here.

Another second book by an author whose first was very successful is Daniel G. Hoffman's *A Little Geste*. Hoffman is extremely intelligent and a very conscientious craftsman; his language is the good live exact language that we can expect of serious poets today. He shows great confidence in the power of words and explanations; if he has a failure it is understanding too much about the occasions of his poems and stating their conclusions too thoroughly. There is less here of the virtuoso minute precision of description that marked his first book, and more of drama. The drama is not large, is not meant to be. The "Geste" is a re-telling of the Robin Hood ballads as rituals, in an interesting and very well done variety of forms. The very precision of the old forms means, however, that their exercise dominates and diminishes the violence of the story. But this, too, would probably have been the poet's intention. Hoffman is always capable of doing exactly what he intends.

Very briefly I shall report on the works of ten more poets, all of them, I believe, publishing now their first volumes. With the one exception that I shall come to last, none of them has an attitude or voice or subject that could be called striking. Most of them are skillful and their skill is, naturally, that of the time. They sound intelligent, they are very aware of their craft in diction and meter, they are, most of them, as young people seem to be these days, travelled, cultured, knowing, and unperturbed. Poems could wander from one of these books to another without feeling lost. But I shall try to distinguish them as best I can. And we should remember again that, supposing there should be poems, and being glad there are so many of them, poems are not meant to be read one after the other in long sessions. These poets have been rather crowded together for me, and perhaps it is not their fault that I think they look quite a bit alike.

The seventh volume of Scribner's series, *Poets of Today,* presents the work of James Dickey, Paris Leary, and Jon Swan. They are all accomplished. Dickey is very imaginative, even fanciful, and has a rich variety of subjects. His war poems are the most memorable poems in this book, very real and moving with their controlled violence of fantasy. In other moods, Dickey has contrived a style based on sentences one line long, repeated or varied slightly in poems like long loose villanelles. Sometimes they achieve an incantatory fascination, sometimes not. When they succeed, they are genuine creations of language.

Paris Leary writes orderly comments on the European and American scene, travelling intelligently through landscapes and ideas. His poems are fluent and well-made, and sometimes, as in "Budapest," the feeling and language are very sharp and accurate. His shrewd,

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prosy character sketches are admirable for their attempts to get into poetry a sense of real people, but most of them are much moralized, like his landscapes, and the subjects are sadly foreshortened, perhaps by the poet's having assumed for his viewpoint a position a little higher than necessary.

To say the best for Jon Swan's poems, they also are fluent and accomplished. His love poems have charm, his satirical poems have some wit, the poems for occasions of leaving-takings or arrivals, things like that, are urbane and appropriate. *Poets of Today VII,* then, presents three good poets, no literary monuments, but honest work in an honorable calling.

Lewis Turco's *First Poems* contains formal experiments in intricate veins of lighter song, much like the first poems of several of the other younger poets noticed here. His subjects are the usual ones, too, the campus, himself, boyhood memories. But Turco is truly witty, and as a result these songs of his have a genuine and spontaneous charm that in the others is only approximate.

Robert Mezey's first book, *The Wandering Jew,* is as notable as Turco's but in another way. It is a small pamphlet, containing one poem of something over a hundred lines, a fragment of autobiography. The impressive thing is the intensity and balance achieved in a succession of regular quatrains, metrically precise, with no verbal acrobatics or exhibits of imagination, simply a sober and exact presentation in perfectly measured language. The result is genuine authority.

The Summer Anniversaries is Donald Justice's first book. Justice is clearly a very skillful writer, with a real intelligence. I do not feel that he has yet created for himself a truly personal voice. He speaks sometimes in the accents of Ransom or Empson, sometimes in the good general style of our time; the poems he makes up are very well made, but still, made-up. The best poems are those concerned with memories of childhood.

Christopher Logue, in his *Songs,* seems to wish his reader to understand that he, Logue, wants no part of meditative walks around the college. He has written instead satires on such issues of our times as military conscription, pedantic philosophers (to whom he prefers girls), punishment by hanging; and he is opposed to the idea of exploding hydrogen bombs on England. I detect no force or originality or virtue of language whatsoever in his voicing of these sentiments, but only the brash and righteous loudness of someone who insists he will be heard come what may. Yet the brashness, at least, does come to some good. Included here is a long passage from the *Iliad* which Logue is now translating (adapting?). This is a marvel of fresh language, fresh vision, tone, and drama, quite as good in its way as the snatches of Homer that Pound has done. If he can keep this up, Logue's *Iliad* ought to be wonderful.

White Sun Black Sun, by Jerome Rothenberg, is published by the

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Hawk's Well Press. I think the fairest thing I can do is to say that I believe these to be very poor poems, mere jottings about sentiments that some believe to be poetic; and then, because I do not want to take the space to argue, I will say that obviously there are those who would not agree with me: the jacket statement is that these poems of Rothenberg's are among "the *avant garde* works that are again revolutionizing American poetry."

A Correspondence of Americans, by Jack Hirschman, has first of all the virtue of not being genteel. The people in his poems get angry, drunk, lustful, confused, and they seem to inhabit chiefly the less attractive neighborhoods of cities rather than summer resorts in Maine. Yet, despite the fact that he has poems on jazz and Allen Ginsberg, he is not a beatnik-poet. His tradition is older, that of Cummings and Hart Crane. He has not quite managed to create a real style of his own, he leans on gratuitous dissociations of language and image; but the poems are interesting and honest and forceful, and sometimes have a complexity that brings one back to them again and again. This is one of the best books of first poems of the year.

The most truly original of all the books I have read for this review is *Wilderness of Ladies,* by Eleanor Ross Taylor. She brings again to poetry something the novel or essay cannot have, a surpassing depth and clarity and intensity of experience. For nearly all poets, other people are present only to provide occasions for the display of the poet's feelings, and the poet's feelings are not so often those of someone as odd and individual as the people we know. Usually, we have to say, "This is said so that there can be a poem." But in Mrs. Taylor's poems, we are brought to a new region, to new people, to a new voice.

The newness and oddness and difficulty of it may be the first thing to strike us. We are caught in the middle of conversations about things we don't know, strangers we have only just met, and the relations are complex. A young mother speaks in most of the poems, bedevilled by a sense of loss and illness and the bonds of family, of losses to come, and at the same time bedevilled by love. There are children and parents and grand-parents, speaking in their own voices, in fragments that sound like recordings, with the terrible poignancy of dead faces staring out of old brown photographs in an album. In fact the poems seem at first more like a triumph of accurate records than like literary triumphs. Even when they take the form of rhymed songs rather than their usual loose structure of monologue, they sound like something overheard, not something invented. But what we hear is always the crucial and revealing phrase; there are no connections or explanations in these poems. We feel the author begrudges every word, and every word that she has let stand must pay for itself. That is exactly what we ought to expect of poets.

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CECIL HEMLEY

Within a Budding Grove

REVIEWING THIS BOOK[1] presents special problems. A good many of the poets contained in it are practically unknown, and so it is difficult to determine whether the editor has chosen wisely or not from their work. In addition, the presentation of the volume has been so managed that one almost inevitably begins discussing it in inappropriate terms. Anyone who has had a serious interest in American poetry from 1945 to 1960 must see that this is a very eccentric version of what has been going on. It represents Mr. Allen's private view, and that is all, and it shows what happens when a narrow, dictatorial taste attempts to assert itself as authoritative.

But if one overlooks the pretentious name and the confused preface with its outrageous claims, then one can examine the poetry with a little more dispassion. There are a number of good poems in the book, and it is unfair to damn all the contributors because of Mr. Allen's over-enthusiasm. Some of the best writers in the volume have been grossly neglected and, to the extent that the anthology creates interest in their work, it serves some useful purpose.

Mr. Allen, himself, recognizes that the writers whose cause he is attempting to further do not form a school. What they have in common, according to him, is a rebellion from what he terms "academic verse" and a building on the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. He attempts no definition of academic verse—and this is a pity—but we can form a rough idea of what he has in mind from the host of well-known younger poets who are omitted. On the whole, the poets Mr. Allen is backing have little use for meter and rhyme, and they do not seek for what D. H. Lawrence called "the crystallized poem." But even here there are exceptions. What is more, those poets who, more or less, do fit Mr. Allen's prescription, differ in so many other ways that they often make uneasy bedfellows.

To some extent Mr. Allen realizes this and, to give the book a semblance of coherence, has divided it into five sections. The first group—the so-called Black Mountain poets—are highly self-conscious, skilled artists. Writers who have been practicing their craft for a number of years, their work soars above the general level of the collection. At their best, they are quite individual and do not have a school style.

The two I admire most are Denise Levertov and Robert Duncan. Miss Levertov is an extremely responsible artist, writing with great tact and precision. Since she insists that all elements of her work be

[1] THE NEW AMERICAN POETRY 1945-1960. Edited by *Donald M. Allen*. Grove Press. $5.95.

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meaningful in the larger sense, her poems have a classic firmness which is particularly remarkable when one realizes that she composes exclusively in free verse. If I have any fault to find with her work, it is with the aggregate where I feel a certain monotony of tone; and this I think comes about because of her refusal to extend her technical range.

Robert Duncan, on the other hand, has no technical limitations. From the point of view of craft, he is undoubtedly the most mature poet in the volume. But, then, Duncan is not at all school-minded. His literary sympathies are broad, and he has incorporated into his art ways of doing things that are not specifically modern. Thus, he has affinities with both surrealism and the emblematic poetry of the seventeenth century. In his finest work, he creates a literature of magic; at his worst, he falls into aestheticism. I like him least when he is writing about poetry. But, then, I rarely find poetry about poetry interesting.

I am less enthusiastic about Robert Creeley, a third member of the group. His forte is the short lyric and his method has been extremely influential among young poets. Creeley's poems can be graceful and arch, but they do not generate much power. However, my incapacity to read him with enjoyment may be a personal limitation.

Charles Olson, the oldest member of the group and in many respects its mentor, is the closest in style to Pound. Some of the poems are quite strong, and some of the brief lyrics lovely. But many of Olson's longer poems seem to me to fragment, and he, like his master before him, is somewhat compulsively learned; I am happiest with him when he eludes the references and sticks to the business in hand.

Before passing to the second group, I should like to mention Edward Dorn, who has done some very fine work and is moving toward a directness of speech which is refreshing after so much nuance. Unfortunately, the best poem I have read by Dorn, "Sousa," is not included—indeed was probably written after the collection was assembled.

The second section involves the poets of the "San Francisco Renaissance," and, after reading this group, I defy anyone to tell me what this particular renaissance signified. A rebirth which includes Brother Antoninus and Lawrence Ferlinghetti is truly protean. Brother Antoninus writes eloquently, and is Hopkinsesque, religious and intense. His poems are involved with nature and the divine which shines through nature. Ferlinghetti is, on the other hand, brash and witty, and absolutely up to date. His poem "He" is surely the best satirical portrait in the book, but it is most noticeably lacking in Christian charity. Unlike Brother Antoninus he is obviously involved in literary feuding and his influences extend from the early Auden to the most advanced French school. I find some of his typographical stunts annoying; sometimes the poem is so spattered it can scarcely be read. But he is an extremely clever poet. I have seen better poems of James Broughton than the one that appears in this volume. When he published his book *Musical Chairs,* I do not believe he belonged to the San Francisco

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"Renaissance," but here he is along with Philip Lamantia and Lou Welch, a mass of conflicting styles and personalities scrambled together. And as for Helen Adam, I do not know why she is in the book at all. Whatever the merits of her ballad "I Love my Love," it belongs to the oldest tradition in English verse, and you can count the feet.

"Beat" poetry—to which the third section is dedicated—is still another matter. One can at least determine what it is, and its practitioners have a strong family resemblance. This does not mean that they are all of the same calibre. As far as I am concerned the Beats have so far produced only one poet worth talking about and that is Allen Ginsberg. What is included in this volume of Jack Kerouac is beneath contempt. The selections (and they are all I know of his work) suggest that he knows nothing at all about verse, that he writes automatically, and, one way or another, manages to keep the words that come out absolutely untouched by feeling and intellect. An early lyric of Gregory Corso, entitled "Old Crow," is the only poem I admire by this writer. For the most part, Corso is so mad for language and effect that he has allowed himself to become a metaphor machine, and he has certainly thought up some of the worst metaphors to be found in the twentieth century—which is no mean achievement.

But Ginsberg, despite his obvious faults, is a poet. He belongs to the declamatory school which means that he is happy with broad dramatic effects and does not care too much about verbal niceties. But, though his work is rough-hewn, it coheres and it is powerful. It succeeds in registering that scream of protest he feels mandatory at the moment. And that, I think, is the reason for his substantial vogue. His subject matter is of the utmost urgency to his audience, which knows what he is talking about. That Ginsberg ultimately has no solutions for the problems of modern life does not in the least mean he is a nihilist. In "Howl" he is basically a moralist. His hatred, like that of the Jewish prophets in the Bible, is aimed at Moloch. Nor does it matter that some of his characters in limbo are homosexual and take dope; he remains in the tradition of the blasters of evil.

Passing from the third section to the fourth, we enter a new area and are among what Mr. Allen calls the New York poets. As with San Francisco so with New York, the decor is strange and various. The most realized of the New York poets is Barbara Guest, whose sensibility has no relationship whatever to those of her associates. Miss Guest writes vividly and with feeling extremely personal poems in a somewhat baroque tradition. She is modern in much the same way as is a poet like Katherine Hoskins and does not appear to be at all in the Pound or Williams line. Nor, for that matter, has Kenneth Koch's style been born of the aesthetics that is supposed to have shaped this volume. His style has been bequeathed to him by the minor French ironists of the nineteenth century (which of course makes it ultra-new). Koch has, in contradistinction to many of the poets in this volume, a feeling for

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shape—but for the present is not too concerned with what he shapes, and it is somewhat instructive to compare his poem "Fresh Air" with Ginsberg's "Howl." Koch's poem is a spit-ball attack on literature and all that it is capable of generating is a sophomoric nastiness which can only be of interest to those involved in coterie politics. Where Ginsberg's art is angry and large, Koch's is "snotty" and trivial. If he is to be a satirist of any note, he will have to grow in feeling. Edward Field, in contrast to Koch, is a very serious poet, but is so weighed down by his own anguish that there is something a little leaden about the verse. One feels, however, that there is genuine passion struggling here in a real person and that this could break through at any moment into important poetry. There is also no doubt that Frank O'Hara is gifted, although of the many poems by him included here, not one is successful. But it is apparent from O'Hara's stated aesthetic that he is not interested in writing good poetry in the usual sense. He has committed himself to the somewhat dubious task of tracing his "experience" in all its solipsistic grandeur. Since most of his experience, like everyone else's, is disjointed and incoherent, the better he follows his theory, the worse his poems become. Every now and again, he evidently forgets his theory long enough to write moving passages.

The fifth section is a general catch-all. Here are young poets who could not be thrust in anywhere else. As is to be expected, much of the work is confused and worthless, but there are at least two poets of distinct talent. In "A Poem for the Old Man," John Wieners develops real feeling and manages his short line with rhetorical brilliance. Le Roi Jones also can write poetry that goes far beyond the student exercise. His "The Turn Coat" is a very beautiful piece and better than anything else of his in the book. If Jones can forget to be funny and write about what most concerns him, he may well produce a significant body of work.

Obviously an anthology which contains so much that is unrealized cannot be considered a complete success. Even from the point of view of the poets of value who are included, the general mediocre tone of the volume is a handicap. Skimming through the book, one's first impression is of a general grayness. One does not feel like plunging in; incoherence and bad metaphors threaten to drown one.

In addition, since the editor has made such vast claims for what he is offering, there is an inclination not only to withdraw but to laugh. This is so obviously *not* the new American poetry. It is difficult to say exactly what the book is, since, although it does not present a reasonably catholic selection, neither does it exhibit poets of merely a single tendency. The first section offered alone would have been correctly named *A Black Mountain Anthology,* but the addition of the other four sections has created chaos.

How confused the editor's general position is can be seen in that he speaks of the poets in the volume as comprising a single literary gen-

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eration. Of course, they do no such thing. Charles Olson was born in 1910, James Broughton in 1913, Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1919, Allen Ginsberg in 1926, and Ray Meltzer in 1937. In other words, Ray Meltzer could conceivably have been Charles Olson's son. A very extensive generation!

On the face of it, this may not seem to be a very important matter. But, if the dates of this generation range from 1910 to 1937, it is difficult to understand why certain poets Mr. Allen admires (he says so in the preface) are excluded from the book. Elizabeth Bishop was born in 1911 and Robert Lowell in 1917. I do not know the year of Kenneth Rexroth's birth but suspect he is no older than Charles Olson. Can it be that Robert Lowell is less a part of the new poetry than Helen Adam (who was born in 1909 and writes, let us recall, in ballad meter)? Why should Kenneth Rexroth, so intimately associated with San Francisco, have been excluded from its protean Renaissance? Finally, what are Mr. Allen's principles? The volume has neither historical nor aesthetic coherence. The truth is that the anthology of *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* remains to be done.

Such a book ought certainly to include some of the poets Mr. Allen has represented in this volume, and it is to his credit that he has been so influential in bringing them to public attention. But to be truly representative an anthology of the period would have to exhibit American verse in all its variety. Over these years a considerable number of good poets have developed: among others Richard Wilbur, May Swenson, Jean Garrigue, Daniel Hoffman, Louis Simpson, W. D. Snodgrass, etc., etc.—and a number of somewhat older poets, like Theodore Roethke and Stanley Kunitz, have built upon what they did previously. Although these poets are not Poundians nor followers of Dr. Williams, their verse is new in any meaningful sense. But then newness and oldness are actually not very useful terms when one discusses poetry. The critic's evaluation is finally based upon other matters; and it seems to me that Miss Levertov's principles, stated on pp. 410-11 of this volume, are as good as any.

Poets, Miss Levertov says, are not merely seers, "but they are also *makers,* craftsmen. It is given the seer to see, but it is then his responsibility to communicate what he sees." And Miss Levertov continues, "every space and comma is a living part of the poem and has its function. And the way the lines are broken is a functioning part essential to the poem's life." In addition, "Content determines form, and yet that content is discovered only *in* form . . . *means* should never intrude, whether from intention or carelessness."

I agree most heartily. Thus the poet must write, and thus the critic must judge. It will be noted Miss Levertov says nothing about free or measured verse, or for that matter, about academic or non-academic poetry. Whether a poem is alive or dead can only be known by experiencing it.

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VIVIAN MERCIER

O'Casey Alive

On March 30, 1960, Sean O'Casey celebrated his eightieth birthday. If any proof be needed that the man and his work are still alive—and kicking—these three lively books[1] supply it. Putting his latest play to one side for the moment, we'll look first at his two sturdy defenders from the American universities.

No question about it, Mr. Krause and Mr. Hogan *are* counsel for the defense—and for very good reason. The perennial indictment against O'Casey falls under two heads: (a) he hasn't written a good play since *The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock,* and *The Plough and the Stars,* the last of which was completed in 1926; (b) those three plays were pretty shoddy stuff too. The first half of the indictment carries the greater weight, but the second has, naturally, a longer history. From the start of O'Casey's career as a dramatist, certain critics have maintained either that the three early plays were not plays at all but collections of vaudeville acts, or that by mingling comedy and tragedy O'Casey violated the canons of true dramatic art.

Mounting their counterattacks from widely separated bases, Messrs. Krause and Hogan execute a pincers movement which annihilates the opponents of the early plays. In his chapter "The Tragi-Comic Muse," Mr. Krause seeks potent critical allies such as Dr. Johnson and Plato to support his view that tragi-comedy is a valid genre. Like O'Casey himself, he cites the precedent of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans generally; as well, he traces a specifically Irish ancestry for O'Casey from the nineteenth-century dramatist Dion Boucicault and, of course, Synge.

Mr. Hogan, on the other hand, uses Chekhov as a *point d'appui* and postulates two equally valid types of dramatic structure: the "structure of action" of the traditional well-made play and the "structure of character" employed by Chekhov, O'Casey and others. The latter term is hardly satisfactory, since an O'Casey play may be full of action; Mr. Hogan usually prefers to speak of "the second structure," though I'm afraid he is a little careless in the use of his own terminology. However, his main point is clearly made: a Chekhov or O'Casey play does not contain a single, straight-line plot; instead, it has a single overriding theme, commented upon in a wide variety of tones and from a number of different viewpoints through a series of sub-plots, each centering on the development of one major character. Similarly, Ben

[1] SEAN O'CASEY: THE MAN AND HIS WORK, by *David Krause.* Macmillan. $4.50. THE EXPERIMENTS OF SEAN O'CASEY, by *Robert Hogan.* St. Martin's Press. $5.00. THE DRUMS OF FATHER NED, by *Sean O'Casey.* St. Martin's Press. $2.95.

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Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* is a critique of Puritanism embodied in a long series of little scenes that might almost be termed vaudeville sketches, yet in *Volpone,* for instance, Jonson shows himself a master of the well-made play.

Between them, Messrs. Krause and Hogan build up an unassailable critical justification for the naive delight that many sophisticated people experience at a good performance of any of the three early plays. Perhaps Mr. Hogan has identified one important reason for the widespread dissatisfaction with O'Casey's later plays when he remarks that "the modern audience has become more sophisticated than the playwright. . . . In this day, when the theater is no more a popular art and depends chiefly upon the college graduate for its audience, the crowning mainstay of the form, its magnificent naïveté, its theatricality, is forgotten."

Nevertheless, one of the great weaknesses in the middle period of O'Casey's development seems to be the playwright's own striving after greater sophistication. Mr. Hogan quotes with approval a remark by George Jean Nathan that is new to me and painfully relevant to O'Casey: "The two worst influences on present-day playwrights are, very often, Strindberg and Communism." If for "Strindberg" we read "Expressionism," I would say that between them the two influences account for all O'Casey's worst plays: *The Silver Tassie, Within the Gates, The Star Turns Red,* and *Oak Leaves and Lavender.* The attempt to provide his drama with an ideological foundation and an *avant-garde* manner (one which was already rather *passé*) very nearly ruined O'Casey for good.

The whole point of the early plays was that abstract theories, when put to the pragmatic test of day-to-day living, proved to be "all a cod." Irish nationalism, the Covey's socialism, Charlie Bentham's theosophy, and so on failed miserably in human terms. If only somebody had told O'Casey that he was an Existentialist in his early plays, we might have been spared at least some of the whoring after strange "isms" in the middle period. Mr. Hogan applauds in such late plays as *Cock-a-doodle Dandy* and *The Bishop's Bonfire* a synthesis between the early manner and what O'Casey retained as permanently valuable from his Expressionist phase. I would group with these *Red Roses for Me,* which Mr. Hogan, unlike Mr. Krause and myself, finds disappointing.

We encounter here a special problem which Mr. Hogan takes particular note of. For various reasons, beginning with the Abbey Theatre's rejection of *The Silver Tassie* in 1928, the typical critic reads a play of O'Casey's before he sees it. Now, as one who had the good fortune to see both *Juno* and *Plough* performed by virtually the original casts, I found both plays disappointing when later encountered in cold print. I had to see them performed again to reassure myself of their greatness. Mr. Hogan, I gather, has not seen any production of *Red Roses,* whereas I saw a fine one in Dublin, directed by Shelagh

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Richards, with Dan O'Herlihy as Ayamonn. Similarly, Mr. Krause's good opinion of the play seems to be based on the New York production. O'Casey on the stage, well performed, is a totally different proposition from O'Casey on the page. O'Casey belongs to the theater rather than to literature; as Mr. Paul Shyre's dramatizations have abundantly proved, even the playwright's autobiography is theatrically conceived. "Literature," in quotes, has often been O'Casey's Nemesis.

The Hogan-Krause defense of middle and late O'Casey lacks the cohesion and force of their counterattack on behalf of the early plays. Both men are conscious of weaknesses in the works, which their critical integrity will not permit them to gloss over. Nevertheless, they once again complement each other. Mr. Krause undertakes the general defense of an artist's right to experiment with new subject matter and techniques, while Mr. Hogan, whose terms of reference confine him mostly to matters of technique, continues his investigation of the structural principles implicit in the plays, finding greater coherence than more superficial critics have recognized. As director of the world premiere of *The Drums of Father Ned* at Lafayette, Indiana, he is especially competent to discuss the freewheeling, almost "symphonic" form of that play. Neither he nor Mr. Krause has succeeded in convincing me that the three early plays are equalled by any of their successors, but both have at least persuaded me to reopen my mind on the whole subject.

Though not the fully documented biography that its title would seem to imply, Mr. Krause's book is much longer and wider in scope than Mr. Hogan's. In his opening chapter Mr. Krause summarizes forthrightly the immense physical, educational, economic and social handicaps over which O'Casey triumphed. He documents from unimpeachable sources the barely credible overcrowding, poverty, filth and disease in which Dublin slum dwellers rotted throughout O'Casey's youth and early manhood. Jim Larkin's epic struggle to unionize the Dublin unskilled workers is re-enacted for us, so that readers unfamiliar with this phase of Irish history can fully understand why all O'Casey's later thinking on the subject of capital and labor was shaped irrevocably by his experience of the savage Dublin strike and lockout of 1913. While Mr. Krause seems deliberately to avoid explicit statements about O'Casey's later deep involvement with Communism—which included, as I recall, membership of the editorial board of the British *Daily Worker*—he makes us grasp what a natural and inevitable attraction Communism exerted on the playwright as a result of his early experiences.

Of course, the origins of O'Casey's ideology become evident to any reader of the autobiography. Where Mr. Krause does some real pioneer work is in relating O'Casey's dramatic method to his Irish background. It was from Irish Boucicault, even more than from English Shakespeare, that O'Casey derived his "clever and mischievous rogue-hero"

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or "anti-hero." Captain Boyle and Fluther Good are descendants of Boucicault's Conn the Shaughraun and Shaun the Post even more than they are the progeny of Falstaff and Autolycus. Boucicault's tricksters, so much more important than the "juvenile leads" in his plays, belong to an Irish folk and literary tradition which is older than Mr. Krause realizes. In Gaelic literature such resourceful, humorous low-life characters generally turn out to possess magical powers and, in fact, to be gods in disguise. Furthermore, Boucicault's and O'Casey's lightning shifts from pathos to satire and humor and from prose to lyric verse and song are commonplace in Gaelic literature.

Mr. Krause quotes in full an Anglo-Irish vaudeville song-and-patter "routine," dating from not later than 1845, in which he sees some analogies with O'Casey's dramatic technique. Again a Gaelic tradition lies behind: the *crosánacht,* a similar medley of verse and prose, of grave and gay, often composed as an epithalamium, can be traced back a long way in Gaelic literature. Brendan Behan's *The Hostage,* which clearly owes a great deal to the experiments of O'Casey, also captures some of the spirit of *crosánacht.* Mr. Krause realizes the importance of O'Casey's knowledge of Gaelic, though he probably exaggerates its extent, and writes some good pages on the relationship between O'Casey dialogue and Dublin folk speech.

Sean O'Casey: The Man and His Work gives very few biographical facts which are not already familiar to readers of O'Casey's six-volume autobiography. In general, Mr. Krause does not deal at length with the events of O'Casey's life except when these are intimately connected with his career as a playwight: the riots against *Plough,* the rejection of *Tassie* (also very fully documented by Mr. Hogan in an appendix), and the withdrawal of *The Drums of Father Ned* which led to the collapse of the Dublin Tóstal Theatre Festival in 1958. Mr. Krause supplies the fullest account I have seen of this last debacle, which was directly attributable to the intervention of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin.

One great influence on the later career of O'Casey was his marriage in 1927 to Eileen Reynolds Carey. Mr. Krause merely notes the marriage and the births of O'Casey's three children, but one hears that it has been an exceptionally happy one. Those who know Mrs. O'Casey all seem to agree that her personality radiates warmth. Fatherhood, too, appears to have mellowed O'Casey. Happy domesticity may have helped to blunt the edge of O'Casey's satire and to encourage the search for an affirmative philosophy which can be so clearly traced in most of the plays after 1927. No one will begrudge O'Casey his belated contentment, but some may feel that what was good for the man tended to dilute the powers of the dramatist.

When one turns to *The Drums of Father Ned,* it is soon apparent that age has dimmed the playwright's fire somewhat. One can easily imagine the humor and irony which the O'Casey of long ago could

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have squeezed from the idea that two pious Irish businessmen are importing timber from an Iron Curtain country; in the new play he barely hints at the ironic possibilities of this situation. Nevertheless, the "Prerumble" or prologue, in which the two businessmen reveal a greater hatred for each other than for the detested British "Black and Tans," opens up a vintage bottle of O'Casey's ironic slapstick, while at the same time typifying the bitter internal divisions of Ireland's Civil War and later party politics.

The play proper dramatizes the preparations for the coming Tóstal (cultural festival) in the little town of Doonavale. While the young are enthusiastically pro-festival, officialdom, business and the Church—as represented by the local parish priest, Father Fillifogue—are as heartily anti. Yet the young find their inspiration in a mysterious, dynamic "Father Ned," who is here, there and everywhere offstage. One begins to suspect, from the descriptions given of him, that he is "no right priest" at all but an incarnation of the god Angus, the Celtic Eros, who appears disguised as a cleric in at least one medieval Gaelic story. O'Casey skillfully avoids making the identification explicit. Whereas the symbolic giant rooster of *Cock-a-doodle Dandy* came onstage frequently, O'Casey wisely doesn't allow Father Ned to appear before the footlights at all: he is present only in the words of others and in the offstage thunder of his drum.

Much of the play exploits the comically clumsy efforts of the Doonavalers to rehearse their historical pageant, their musical program and—in the case of the wives of the two businessmen who are also town officials—their ceremonial deportment. For the rest, youth and "the music of life" triumph easily over the old and the Philistines. Except for a boring Northern Irishman whose sympathies are divided between admiration for the energy of the young and contempt for their indifference to profits, there is no conflict within any of the characters, while the result of the external conflict seems all along a foregone conclusion. More a triumphal march than a play, *The Drums of Father Ned* promises an evening of rowdy fun if properly directed. There is no mingling of tragedy and comedy here; what Aristotle would have made of the play I am not sure, but Aristophanes would have felt thoroughly at home with it. In *The Origin of Attic Comedy* F. M. Cornford analyzes each of the latter's plays as a victory for youth and fertility over age and sterility, culminating in a triumphal procession.

I remarked above that "literature" has often been O'Casey's Nemesis: the dialogue assigned to the two pairs of young lovers in *Father Ned* gives all-too-many illustrations of this point. Many of O'Casey's later characters develop the unpleasant habit of listening to themselves talk, in sad contrast to the wonderfully unselfconscious dialogue of the characters in the three early plays. One of the boys in *Father Ned* says to his girl, "Angus the Young is by our side; we hear his harp-music, and his brilliant birds are perching on our shoulders." Fair enough;

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one accepts the mythological allusion and the near-Syngean cadence; after all, this is not a realistic play. But Nora replies, "For a brief while, my Michael. The purple tint of love must fade, and its passion becomes a whisper from a night that's gone. May our love pass quietly into companionship, for that is the one consummation of united life." Now *that* is "literary" in the manner of Ella Wheeler Wilcox. (Poor woman! If she had never existed, one would have had to invent her.) The true tragedy of O'Casey lies in the fact that he never achieved a sure touch with the heightened speech which his later anti-realist drama constantly demands. It is not coherent structure but consistent style in which he is found wanting. *Father Ned* offers many other examples of bathos in verse and prose. On the stage, delivered with conviction, they might get by; on the page, they can't.

One complaint frequently made against O'Casey by his fellow Irishmen—I have made it myself—is that he has lost touch with contemporary Ireland. By representing the average priest or official or businessman as anti-Tóstal and anti-culture, O'Casey robs himself of countless opportunities for humor and irony. Frank O'Connor or Brendan Behan would know that Philistines just eat up cultural festivals. Half of Ireland's new Babbitts are patrons of the arts, and so are many counterparts of Father Fillifogue.

Yet when I reread Mr. Krause's account of how the Archbishop and the Dublin trade unions and the Tóstal Council itself torpedoed both *The Drums of Father Ned* and a dramatization of Joyce's *Ulysses,* I wonder just who understands contemporary Ireland best, O'Casey or his Irish critics. I, for one, bow before the Old Master and kiss the rod.

***Notes on Contributors** (cont.)*

A collection of poems by WILLIAM STAFFORD, entitled *West of Your City,* is to be published in the near future by the Talisman Press.

A new book of poems by DOROTHY ROBERTS will be published in the Spring by the Ryerson Press, Toronto.

DENIS DONOGHUE directed the first International Yeats Summer School at Sligo last year. He is the author of *The Third Voice,* a study of poetic drama, and is half-way through a second book of criticism.

JOHN SIMON is associate editor of the Mid-Century Book Society. This is his first appearance in THE HUDSON REVIEW.

NORMAN N. HOLLAND, a frequent contributor to this Review, is currently giving a television-course-for-credit, "The Shakespearean Imagination," for the Commission on Extension Courses, Harvard.

EARL MINER is an editor of the California edition of Dryden and is on leave from U.C.L.A. this year to teach at Kyoto and Osaka Universities.

JOHN THOMPSON's new book, *The Founding of English Metre,* will be published later this year by the Columbia University Press.

CECIL HEMLEY has published three books of poems. His first novel, *The Experience,* appeared last year.

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